COVERING THE BEST IN HORROR, SCI-FI & FANTASY ENTERTAINMENT

SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE

#4

$9.95

COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT

REMEMBERING JONATHAN FRID

BRIAN LUMLEY'S NECROSCOPE

HUNGER GAMES vs. BATTLE ROYALE

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE
THEY STILL HAVE THE POWER!

DREADITORIAL

Last issue we featured a retrospective on *Batman Returns*, so it's only fitting that we now borrow a quote from that splendid twenty-year-old film: "Things change." The Penguin says the line to Batman during their first confrontation and, moments later, the Dark Knight verbally counters Gotham's newest villain with the same adage. As could be evidenced from the publication currently in your hands, things *have* changed. Most noticeably, our page count has nearly doubled! It became apparent that our earlier issues, running 52 pages, were insufficient to truly cover *the best* in horror, sci-fi and fantasy entertainment. There's so much more we wanted to include per issue, that it felt like we were selling each installment short just to meet a modest page count requirement. Though the cover price of the magazine has increased as well, I wholeheartedly believe you'll find the additional content to be worth the extra expense.

Also worthy of mention is that *Shadowland* has recently been nominated for not one – but two – *Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Awards*! *Shadowland* received a nomination for 'Best Magazine of 2011' and our extremely talented cover artist, Dwayne Pinkney, received a nomination in the 'Best Magazine Cover' category for his stunning *Phantom of the Opera* cover art on *Shadowland Magazine #1*. Thanks to everyone who voted for *Shadowland* – we are truly honored!

This time around we're giving special attention to the *Masters of the Universe* with retrospectives on the latest action figure line and the 1987 live-action film. The underrated sci-fi thriller *Colossus: The Forbin Project* gets the respect it deserves, and fans of the macabre will find interest in our look back at Brian Lumley's *Necroscope* novels and some of the Universal Monsters merchandising oddities of the 1990s.

On a somber note, we've recently just lost one of the greatest actors to ever wear the vampire fangs, Jonathan Frid – *Dark Shadows*' original Barnabas Collins. Stephen D. Sullivan offers *Shadowland* readers a sincere tribute to the late Mr. Frid.

And a final word before we venture into the shadows once again, *Shadowland Magazine* now has a Facebook page. So those on the social network can "Like Us" on Facebook and keep up to date with the latest on our upcoming issues and news. Check us out at www.Facebook.com/ShadowlandMagazine

Now, without further delay, Eternia and beyond await!

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cover: Not even Skeletor would argue, Dwayne Pinkney has the power! Mr. Pinkney has truly achieved perfection with his Frank Langella Skeletor portrait. Evil has never looked this good!

Back Cover/Inside Back Cover: It goes without saying that Mr. Pinkney has gone all-out this time around, offering us not only a beautiful Jonathan Frid/Barnabas Collins piece (Back Cover), but also a masterful interpretation He-Man's arachnid foe, Webstor (Inside Back Cover). Dwayne Pinkney is available for commissions at DPinkneyArt@hotmail.com - more of his artwork can also be seen at www.ShadowlandMagazine.com.

Contributors: Alexander Bochner, Scott Clark, Tron DeLapp, Amanda Dyar, Stan Fuller, Josh Hadley, Davey Horror, Jon Hudson, Kenny King, Claudia Marinelli, Chris Nelson, Tai Ng, Aaron Percival, Dwayne Pinkney, Arya Ponto, Mark Roberts, Dan Schneider, Richard Shapiro, Scott Shoyer, Jonathan Singer, Lisa Stilts, Stephen D. Sullivan, and Frank Warden. *Special thanks* to Trevor Denham, Anime Focus, Richard Gladman, Donald F. Glut, and, once again, Dwayne Pinkney!

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NEWS BITES

TOTAL REMAKE

A remake of the 1990 sci-fi action thriller *Total Recall* has entered the post-production stage. Colin Farrell will play the lead, a role originally played by Arnold Schwarzenegger. Kate Beckinsale, Jessica Biel, and Bill Nighy co-star. Directed by Len Wiseman. In theaters August 3rd 2012.

THEY'RE BACK AND THEY'RE HUNGRY

A sequel to the 1959 cult B-movie *The Killer Shrews* is expected to hit DVD shelves in 2012. Appropriately titled *The Return of the Killer Shrews*, the film stars James Best (playing the same role he assumed in the original), along with John Schneider (Bo Duke from *The Dukes of Hazzard*).

INTERESTED IN A RENTAL?

An American remake of the Japanese horror film *Apartment 1303* is undergoing post-production and has been scheduled for a mid-to-late 2012 release. Starring Mischa Barton, *Apartment 1303* is billed as a 'modern ghost story' and will be in 3D.

ARGONAUTS GET A NEW FLEECE ON LIFE

Vanquish Motion Pictures is currently working on *Jason and the Argonauts: The Kingdom of Hades*. The film, set after Jason and his band of Argonauts complete their quest to find the Golden Fleece, focuses on their dangerous journey home. No release date is yet known.

SORCERER SUPREME TO CAST STRANGE SPELL

Thomas Dean Donnelly and Joshua Oppenheimer, the screenwriting team behind *Dylan Dog: Dead of Night* (2010) and *Conan the Barbarian* (2011), have written a script for the live-action adaptation of Marvel Comics' premiere sorcerer, *Dr. Strange*. No word yet on who will direct.

HOLLYWOOD GETS TOXIC

Elysium Films has optioned *The Toxic Avenger* property with the intent to give Toxie a big budget makeover. Originally released by Troma Entertainment in 1984, *The Toxic Avenger* became one of the most profitable independent films ever made. The remake will be directed by Steve Pink (*Hot Tub Time Machine*). A 2013 release is being planned.

HE IS THE LAW

Judge Dredd will be returning to the silver screen on September 21st 2012 in *Dredd*. The title character, based on a popular series of comic books, was first given a live-action translation with 1995's *Judge Dredd* starring Sylvester Stallone. The film, which deviated from the source material, was met with a lukewarm reception by critics and Dredd fans alike, nixing any hopes for a sequel. The reboot is stated to be far closer in spirit to the original comics.

Criminals are about to *Dredd* justice. Olivia Thirlby and Karl Urban enforce the law.

ANIME'S BEAUTIFUL ASSASSINS ARE BACK

Ghost House Pictures has acquired the rights to the popular Japanese anime series *Noir*. A live-action television adaptation is in pre-production and will air on the Starz! Network in late 2012/early 2013. The anime centered on two female assassins who attempt to uncover the secrets behind a clandestine organization as well as the mysteries of their own pasts.

THE DARK KNIGHT GETS AN ANIMATED UPGRADE

The Caped Crusader's latest animated series *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* may have ended its run back in 2011, but a new cartoon will be hitting the airwaves to take its place in 2013. *Beware the Batman* is scheduled to premiere on Cartoon Network and will be the first series to depict Gotham's nocturnal crimefighter via computer animation.

THREE TIMES THE TERROR

Shadowland Press will soon be reprinting the long out-of-print novelizations of *Gorgo*, *Reptilicus*, and *Konga*. The London-smashing behemoth, *Gorgo*, will be first in the "Titans of Terror" line. Expected release date is late-summer 2012.

DIAMOND SELECT TO HOST A MONSTROUS PARTY

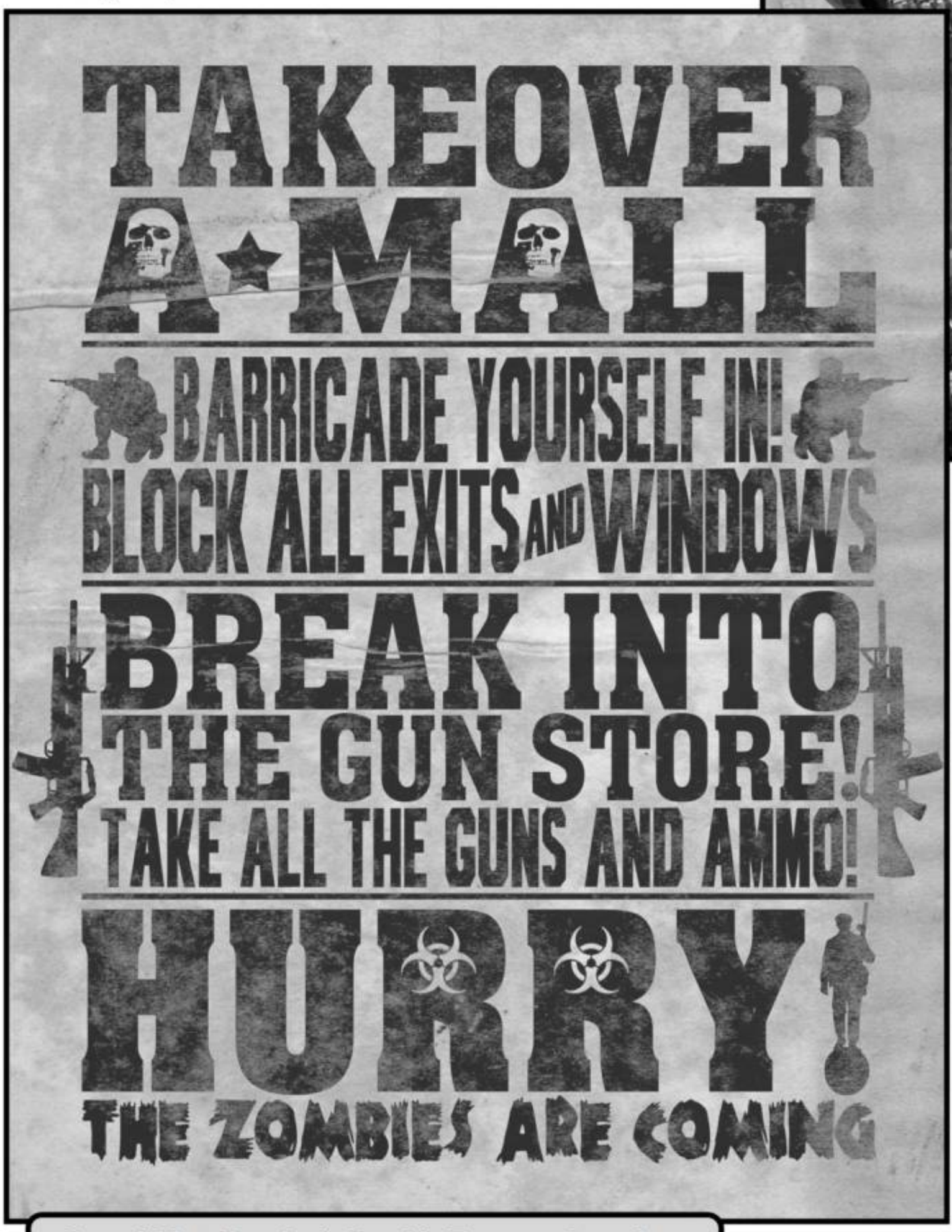
Diamond Select Toys has announced that they will be releasing a line of fully poseable action figures based off *Mad Monster Party* (1967). The stop-motion film, featuring parodies of Universal's classic monsters, was produced by Rankin/Bass – the same studio responsible for holiday TV specials like *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964) and *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town* (1970). No word on when the *Mad Monster Party* figures will be available.

THE MONSTER DEMANDS A MATE – IN PLASTIC!

This spring Moebius Models will be releasing a plastic 1:8 scale model kit of Frankenstein's Monster and the Bride in an iconic pose from the 1935 classic, *The Bride of Frankenstein*. The kit has been sculpted by the very talented Jeff Yagher.

ARTIST BRINGS LIFE TO THE UNDEAD

Graphic artist Matt Peppler has applied his creative talents to ensuring that you know the rules to survive the zombie apocalypse. You can find his "Zombie Rules" typography prints at www.etsy.com/shop/MattPepplerArt along with more of his impressive artwork. Mr. Peppler has been gracious enough to offer Shadowland readers a 10% discount on everything at his Etsy store by using the coupon code SHADOWLANDMAG. Offer valid until January 1st, 2013.



One of Matt Peppler's Zombie Typography prints.

A SHELL OF A COLLECTION

On June 26th 2012 IDW Publishing will be reprinting select issues of the classic Mirage *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* comics. Volume 1 will contain issues #13, #16, and #18 in full color. Volume 2 will be arriving on shelves in September. Those looking for the Turtles' current adventures can check out IDW's current *TMNT* comic series reboot. Also in the works is a new *Ninja Turtles* cartoon to air on Nickelodeon this fall and a feature-length film produced by Michael Bay.

HEAVY METAL WAR

Video game publisher Activision is working with developer High Noon to produce a sequel to the hit 2010 game, *Transformers: War for Cybertron*. The follow-up, titled *Fall of Cybertron*, will depict the final days of the Transformers' home-world as the heroic Autobots valiantly battle the evil forces of the Decepticons. High Noon has stated that there will be new gameplay mechanics, larger environments, a revamped multiplayer mode including the ability to make custom Transformers, and a wide-range of playable characters including the leader of the Dinobots, Grimlock. Gamers will be able to transform and roll out on August 28th, 2012 when *Fall of Cybertron* will be available for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. It has been confirmed that there will not be a port for the PC.

HI-YO SILVER AWAY...AGAIN?

We previously announced in *Shadowland* #2 that Disney had cancelled *The Lone Ranger* due to the disappointing box-office performance of another Western-themed film, *Cowboys and Aliens*. However, *The Lone Ranger* is now back on track with Armie Hammer playing the masked man and Johnny Depp as Tonto. *The Lone Ranger* will ride into theaters on May 31st, 2013.

RE-MASTERING THE TOY UNIVERSE

BY DWAYNE PINKNEY

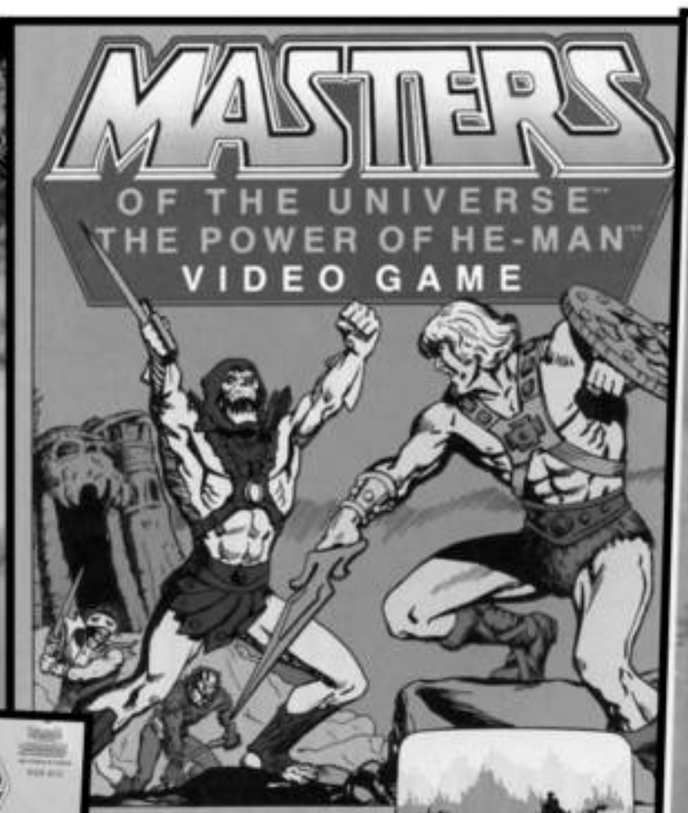
The year was 1982, and I was in fifth grade. At ten years old, I was probably a little too old to be playing with action figures, but since I'm now 40 and *still* playing with them, maybe not. At any rate, my Kenner *Star Wars* figures were the joy of my life. Oh, how I loved those little 3 ¾ inch pieces of plastic. Then one day as I rode the bus to school, one of my classmates reached into his book bag and pulled out something that had all the kids scrambling to get a better look. It was a gigantic 5 ½ inch tall powder blue man with the biggest muscles I had ever seen. This guy made Arnold Schwarzenegger look like a wimp. To top it all off, he had a purple-hooded skull for a head! Who was he?! What was he?! I had to know more. This guy dwarfed all my *Star Wars* figures. He looked like he could take out an army of Stormtroopers with one swipe of his spring loaded waist. This was Skeletor, my introduction to Mattel's *Masters of the Universe*.

It wasn't long after that I acquired my own Skeletor, followed by He-Man, Beast Man, Mer-Man, and a whole slew of others. Each of the original eight figures came with a miniature storybook illustrated by Alfredo Alcala. These initial stories introduced the characters and established He-Man's backstory as a jungle-dwelling barbarian from the planet Eternia, given powerful armor and weapons by The Goddess to defend Castle Grayskull from the evil Skeletor. These were pretty straightforward good versus evil stories, but lacked depth, with the heroes just basically hanging around barren wastelands waiting for the bad guys to do something. Mattel quickly realized that the mini-comic pack-ins alone did not supply enough mass media support for the toys and collaborated later that same year with DC Comics on a three issue mini-series which expanded on the mini-comics and revamped He-Man's origin story. He was no longer a savage jungle barbarian, but Prince Adam of Eternia's Royal Family, and actually transformed into He-Man upon entering a magic cave. The DC stories also further established Eternia as a world of both magic and technology.

In 1983, animation studio Filmation released *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* into syndication and He-Man's world would never be the same. Broadcast into millions of homes, the cartoon brought the franchise to the forefront of American popular culture and Mattel's toy sales skyrocketed. The series further enhanced the storylines established in the DC mini-series. The transforming cave of the DC stories was replaced by a now iconic transformation scene of Prince Adam drawing his magic sword above his head and shouting "By the Power of Grayskull! I HAVE THE

MASTERS
OF THE UNIVERSE
SKELETOR
Lord of destruction!

MASTERS
OF THE UNIVERSE
POWER TOUR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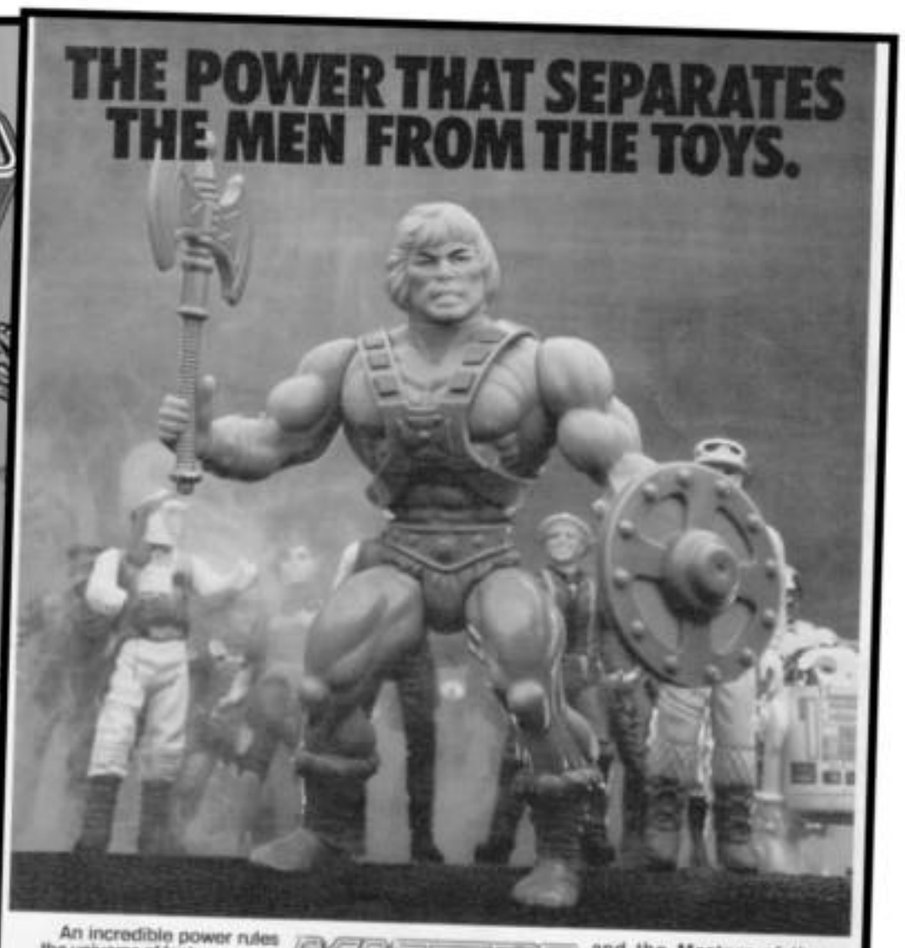
THE POWER OF HE-MAN
VIDEO GAME


THE POWER THAT SEPARATES
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HE-MAN
The Legend Continues
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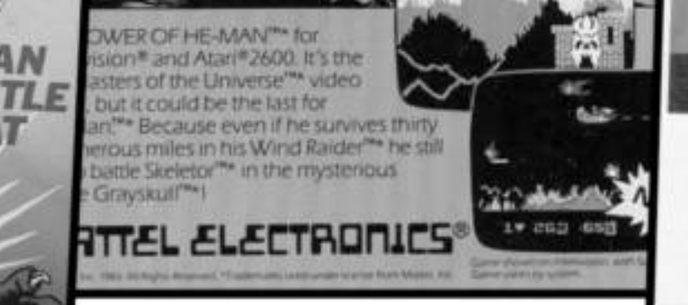
OWER OF HE-MAN™ for
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an!™ Because even if he survives thirty
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year-round schedule of network and television combined with an ambitious campaign will expand awareness and spread the legend of He-Man.
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AND THE
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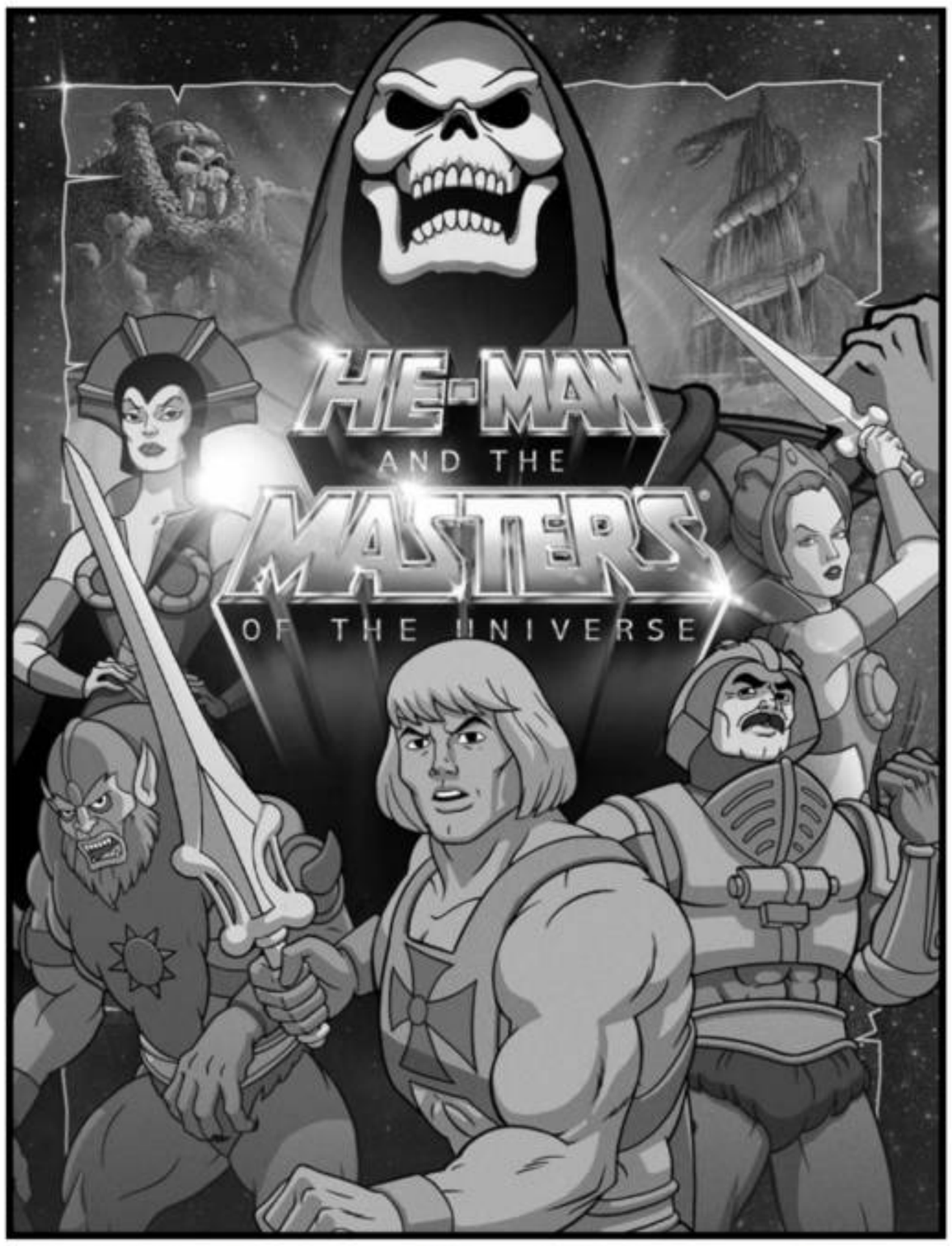
Eternia Trivia Test
Snake Escape
Skeletor and the Fright Fighter meet He-Man and Blasterhawk



POWER!" Like a lot of fans, I find this sequence as electrifying today as it was 30 years ago. Filmation created an entirely new, expanded mythos for He-Man, his allies, and adversaries. They also created many memorable original characters of their own, most notably the Royal Court Jester, Orko, who provided much of the series' comedy relief. The Filmation series ran for two seasons and a whopping 130 episodes, and also spawned a spinoff series featuring He-Man's twin sister She-Ra aimed at attracting girls to the franchise and promoting sales of Mattel's *Princess of Power* toys. She-Ra battled Skeletor's mentor Hordak and his Evil Horde on the planet Etheria. During all of this, Mattel's toylines continued to sell in record numbers, culminating in a live action film in 1987. Starring Dolph Lundgren as He-Man, and Frank Langella as Skeletor, it was the first live action film ever based on a toyline, predating films like *G.I. Joe* and Michael Bay's *Transformers* by more than 20 years. Sorry, Hasbro.

Orko

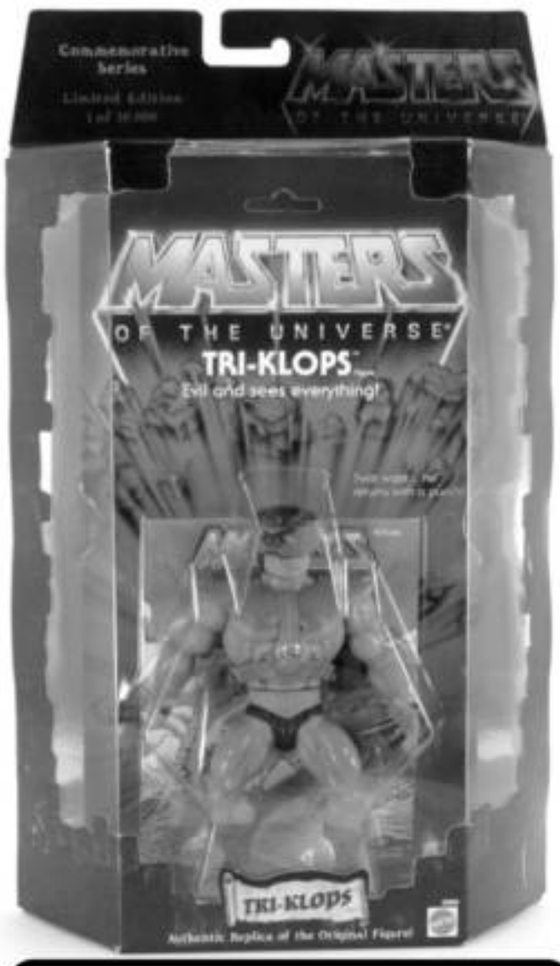
He-Man's twin sister: She-Ra!

By 1988, both the He-Man and She-Ra cartoon series' and live-action film had come and gone, and public interest in He-Man was waning fast. In a last ditch effort to save the franchise, Mattel tried to capitalize on the popularity of sci-fi films such as *Star Wars* by taking He-Man into the future and outer space in 1990's *The New Adventures of He-Man*. A new toyline featured a much skinnier He-Man and a bunch of space adventurers battling a now bionic Skeletor leading a group of pirating mutants. The new toys were accompanied by a new cartoon series produced by Jetlag. It was a huge gamble that unfortunately

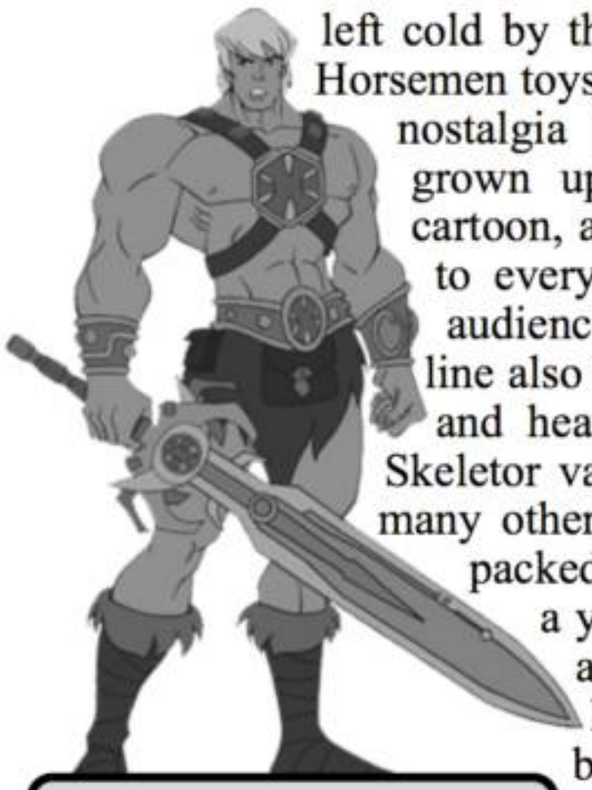
***Above*: He-Man slims down for the '90s while (*left*) Skeletor gets a mechanized makeover.**

did not pay off. Ultimately, the new toys and cartoon did not resonate with fans who found it too far removed from the original source material and concepts. The once mighty walls of Castle Grayskull came tumbling down as quickly as they had been built. He-Man was dead. But, as with any great character, he wouldn't remain so forever.

Fast forward twelve years to 2002, Mattel released a 20th anniversary commemorative series of their original 1982 *Masters* toys, testing the waters for a comeback. The re-releases sold very well, and soon after, *Masters of the Universe* was resurrected as an all-new toyline with a new cartoon by Mike Young Productions. The new *Masters* toys featured leaner, anime-inspired designs, all fantastically sculpted by the talented Four Horsemen Studios. Also accompanying the toys and cartoon was a new comic series from writer Val Staples and artist Emiliano Santalucia. The 2002 relaunch was a moderate success, but fell far short of the glory days He-Man and company enjoyed in the '80s. Many older fans were



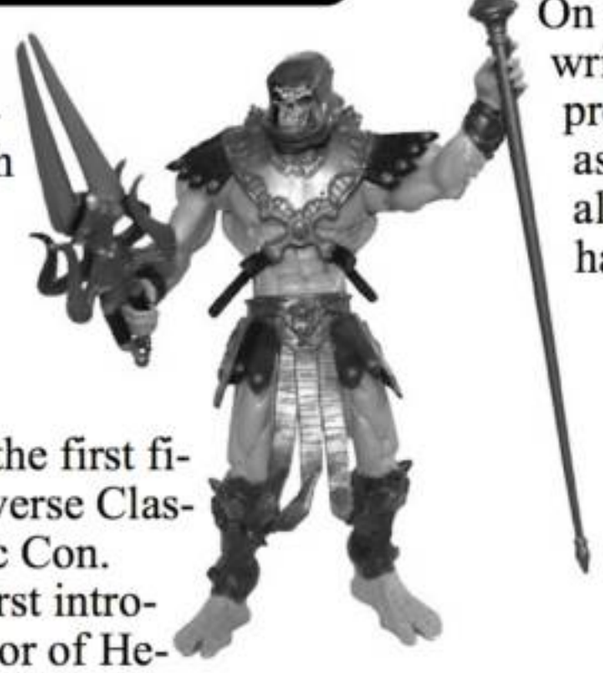
Commemorative Tri-Klops figure.



He-Man returned to TV in 2002, albeit with a more 'anime' style.

left cold by the radical redesigns of the Four Horsemen toys, while young consumers had no nostalgia towards characters they hadn't grown up with. As a result, the toys, cartoon, and comics that set out to appeal to everyone somehow missed the very audiences they were targeting. The new line also suffered from spotty distribution and heavy case ratios of He-Man and Skeletor variants clogging toy aisles while many other popular characters were short-packed and nowhere to be found. After a year, the line quietly disappeared and He-Man went back into hibernation a second time. That brings us to the present. They say great minds think alike, and in the case of the Four Horsemen Studios and Mattel, this is certainly true. The Horsemen had a little idea kicking around in their collective heads, and as it turns out, so did Mattel. An all-new cohesive line of *Masters* toys that would combine all of the previous toylines, cartoons, comics and movie into one definitive canon with a unified look.

2002's Skeletor action figure.



2008: THE COMING OF KING GRAYSKULL

In the summer of 2008, Mattel released the first figure in a new line called "Masters of the Universe Classics" (MOTUC for short) at San Diego Comic Con. The figure was King Grayskull, a character first introduced in the 2002 cartoon series as the ancestor of He-Man. A brief documentary chronicling the development of this figure was included on DVD releases of the 2002 cartoon series. In it, the Four Horsemen explain the premise behind the new series of toys. They set out to recreate the look and feel of the vintage toys from the '80s, but bring them into the modern era with improved sculpting, paint application, and most importantly, poseability. For the first time ever, the classic He-Man figure wasn't stuck in a fixed squatting position. The size of the figures was increased from 5 1/2 to seven inches, giving the new figures the same chunkiness and heft to them that the vintage toys had to a child's smaller hands. As an adult holding a MOTUC, you really do get that same nostalgic feeling you had holding the original figures as a child.

Mattel's 2008 King Grayskull.

The Four Horsemen carefully measured the dimensions of the original figures when designing the new body, making sure the bulging muscular appearance of the originals is still intact. Each figure in the series pays tribute to the original by closely following the original '80s design while increasing the level of sculpted detail. In the case of characters that were exclusive to the anime-detailed 2002 line, the figures are reverse engineered to look as if they had first appeared in the '80s and then given a slight update. Another major change to this new line would be the way it was distributed. Mattel wisely learned from the mistakes of the 2002 line and decided to offer the new figures one at a time through their own website, Mattycollector.com. Their goal was to ensure every fan got the figures they were looking for this time. When the line took off after the first few releases, Mattel even listened to the fans and began a subscription service, ensuring no one who wanted every figure would miss a single one.

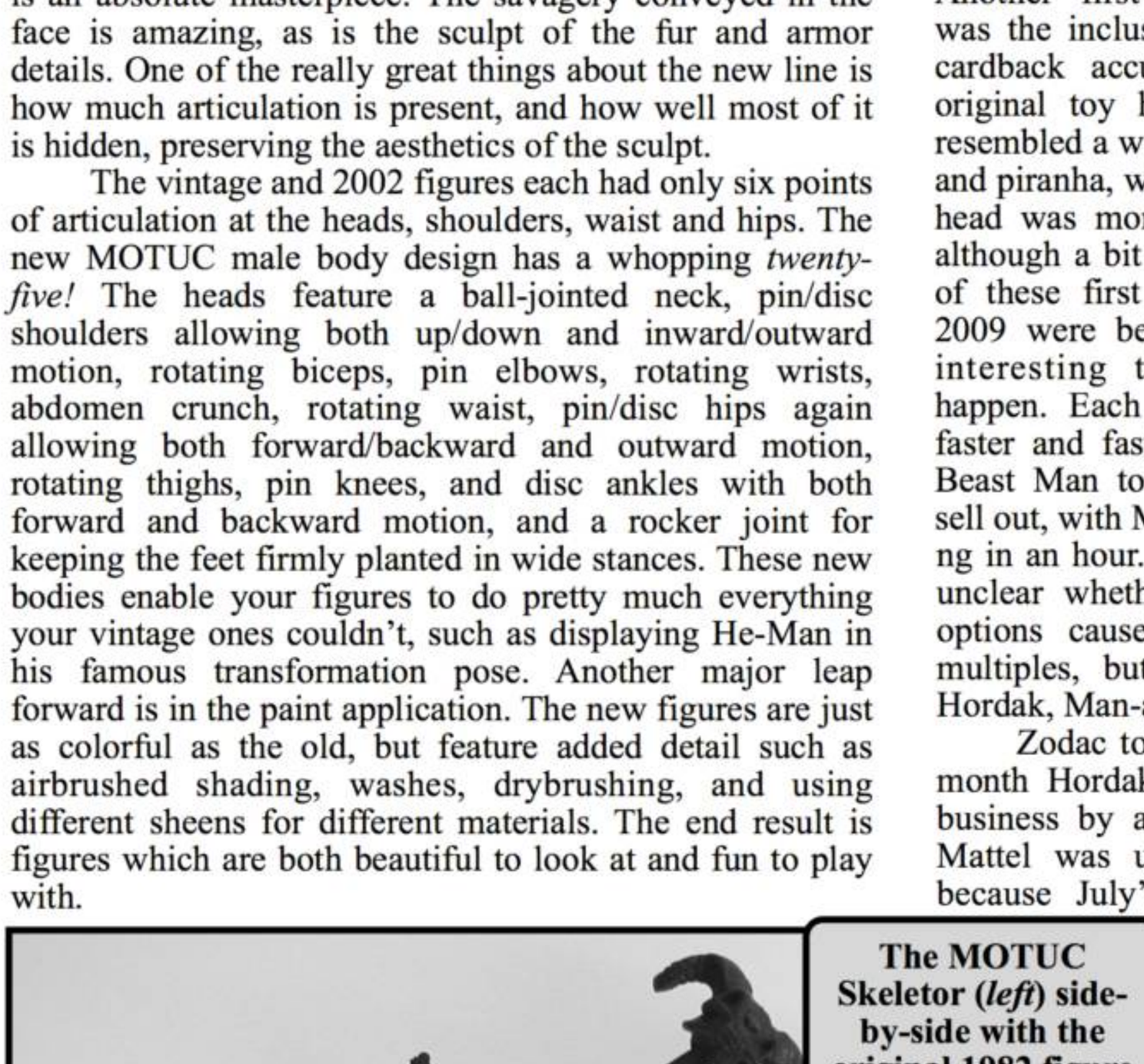
The regular line officially kicked off in December of 2008 with He-Man and Beast Man. The figures come blister carded in all-new packaging which reeks of nostalgia. The new *Masters of the Universe Classics* logo is very similar to the original '80s logo, while lightning very similar to that of the Filmation transformation scenes is actually printed across the bubble, making the package crackle with energy. On the reverse of the cardbacks are all new bios written for each character which are designed to provide new insight into the characters as well as establish an all new cohesive canon making all previous comics, cartoons and films one big happy universe.

He-Man and Beast Man, the first two figures in Mattel's regular MOTUC line.

Both He-Man and Beast Man are incredible updates of their vintage counterparts. He-Man retains his barbaric appearance while subtly suggesting the look of the Filmation cartoon. He comes with all of his classic accessories including his famous Power Sword, shield,

axe, and removable armor, just like the original. Beast Man is an absolute masterpiece. The savagery conveyed in the face is amazing, as is the sculpt of the fur and armor details. One of the really great things about the new line is how much articulation is present, and how well most of it is hidden, preserving the aesthetics of the sculpt.

The vintage and 2002 figures each had only six points of articulation at the heads, shoulders, waist and hips. The new MOTUC male body design has a whopping *twenty-five!* The heads feature a ball-jointed neck, pin/disc shoulders allowing both up/down and inward/outward motion, rotating biceps, pin elbows, rotating wrists, abdomen crunch, rotating waist, pin/disc hips again allowing both forward/backward and outward motion, rotating thighs, pin knees, and disc ankles with both forward and backward motion, and a rocker joint for keeping the feet firmly planted in wide stances. These new bodies enable your figures to do pretty much everything your vintage ones couldn't, such as displaying He-Man in his famous transformation pose. Another major leap forward is in the paint application. The new figures are just as colorful as the old, but feature added detail such as airbrushed shading, washes, drybrushing, and using different sheens for different materials. The end result is figures which are both beautiful to look at and fun to play with.



The MOTUC Skeletor (*left*) side-by-side with the original 1982 figure (*right*).

2009: GONE IN 60 SECONDS

With He-Man and Beast Man out of the way, Skeletor rang in 2009 as January's figure followed by Stratos, Faker, and Mer-Man the following three months. Mer-Man in particular was an exceptional figure, being much improved over his original design. He had the distinction of being the first figure to really deviate from his vintage toy look. The Four Horsemen instead chose to base him off the original cardback design, much to the delight of many fans, including myself. Mer-Man was always my favorite vintage figure, and this update finally gave me the figure I wanted almost 30 years ago. Another first with Mer-Man was the inclusion of a second cardback accurate head. The original toy had a head that resembled a weird hybrid of cat and piranha, while his cardback head was more fishy looking, although a bit goofier. As each of these first four figures of 2009 were being released, an interesting thing began to happen. Each figure sold out faster and faster. He-Man and Beast Man took six weeks to sell out, with Mer-Man vanishing in an hour. MOTUC it seemed, was a runaway hit. It's unclear whether Mer-Man having two different display options caused his faster sellout due to fans buying multiples, but I suspect it did. Next up were Zodac, Hordak, Man-at-Arms, He-Ro, and Tri-Klops.

Zodac took a few days to sell out, but the following month Hordak showed the world the Evil Horde meant business by again selling out in just an hour. By now, Mattel was upping production a bit, and good thing, because July's Man-at-Arms figure was something to behold. This guy was truly, finally, the ultimate Master of Weapons. The Four Horsemen decked him out in all his armored glory and gave him an arsenal he could carry on his back. He, like Mer-Man, also featured a second head, now sporting a mustache just as he did in every incarnation except the original figure. He-Ro was the 2009 San Diego Comic Con exclusive, and was based on a never before released prototype from the '80s. His release caused a lot of excitement and showed that MOTUC was really all-encompassing. Tri-Klops was the final release of the summer and came with the same glow-in-the-dark warrior ring the original figure did as a surprise accessory.

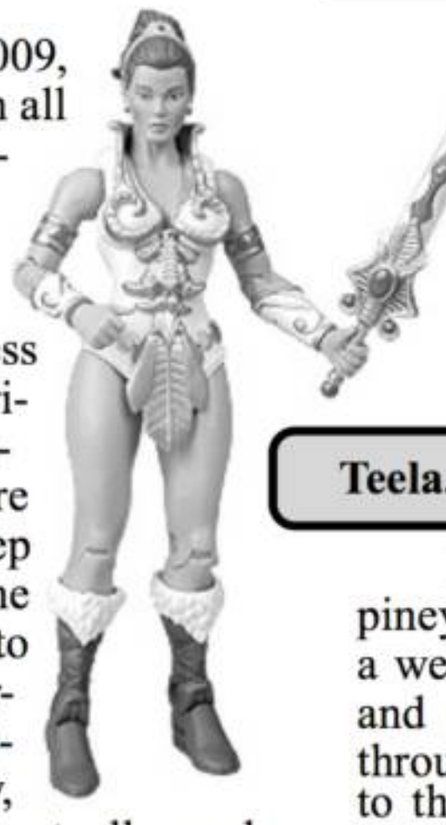
Heading into fall, Mattel released Webstor, Teela, Zodak, Scare Glow, King Randor, and The Goddess. Webstor was the

***Below*: 2009's MOTUC lineup of Zodac, Hordak, and Man-at-Arms.**

first figure to incorporate a major design change inspired by the 2002 series, namely the addition of four extra spider legs on his back. Even most vintage fans seemed to embrace this change, as it made him much more fearsome and spider-like. Teela was the first female released in the line, and is an exquisite figure. Her sculpt is both strong yet very feminine. She looks as if she'd be able to fight right alongside the guys, yet has a certain softness to her. She was also the third figure to sport an additional head, at this time becoming something of a regular occurrence. Zodak was the first straight-up 2002 variant in the line. Mattel chose to make him an independent character of the classic Zodac since their appearance was so different. Scare Glow was a welcome addition to the line, since his vintage figure was one of the later releases and very scarce. His bio also settled a long standing debate among fans…was he actually the ghost *of* Skeletor, or a ghost *serving* Skeletor? Turns out it was the latter.

Webstor.

December saw the last two figures of 2009, with Prince Adam's pop King Randor, and an all new character from the original four mini-comics, The Goddess. This bio was a major turning point in the new MOTUC canon, explaining the existence of multiple versions of He-Man during the early days. The Goddess was charged with the task of appointing warriors to protect the Power Sword. (Now referred to as the Sword of He) These warriors were known as He-Men, and were supposed to keep the myth of He-Man alive until the birth of the the Chosen One, which of course turned out to be Prince Adam, the one true He-Man. Many fans found this idea hard to swallow, but personally, I liked it. It actually made sense and explained a lot. After all, He-Man couldn't be a jungle savage, a barbarian, and a reserved Prince all at the same time.



Teela.

Scare Glow.

2010: BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS

As 2010 kicked off, there were big changes coming for MOTUC. For the first time, beasts and larger size figures were included in the line. January saw the release of Battle Armor He-Man, the first variant of our hero, and Adora, Prince Adam's twin sister and secret identity of She-Ra. Adora joined King Grayskull and The Goddess as characters making their debut in figure form. February was probably the greatest month of the year for most fans, with the long awaited release of fan favorites Trap Jaw and Battle Cat. Trap Jaw is absolute perfection, and yet Battle Cat still managed to one-up him. The vintage Battle Cat was little more than a statue with zero articulation, while the MOTUC version is a fully articulated figure nearly double the size of the original. Also released in February were new Castle Grayskull display stands for the figures. Mattel was really gaining confidence in the line at this point and the variety of product offered shows it.

Battle Cat.

March gave us Moss Man in all his green, flocked and piney glory just in time for St. Patty's Day, with Evil-Lyn, a weapons pack, the first New Adventures mutant Optikk, and classic giant Tytus taking up the remaining slots through May. Subscribers to the line were given a special treat in the form of an exclusive figure only available to them. The figure was Wun-Dar, based on a famously scarce and legendary Wonder Bread giveaway from the '80s. Wun-Dar also came with an exclusive map of Eternia. She-Ra and Keldor arrived in June, with July being the debut of Count Marzo along with the San Diego Comic Con release of a Prince Adam and Orko two-pack. Also at SDCC was a special two-pack based off a Robot Chicken skit featuring Mo-Larr the Eternian Dentist and a toothless Skeletor.

August saw the release of Whiplash, who sported an additional 2002 styled head, followed by Chief Carnivus, a cat-like character from the 2002 animated series. Another '80s concept character which made his way into the line was Gygor, a giant yellow and green gorilla who proved himself a favorite upon his release. Roboto, a chess playing

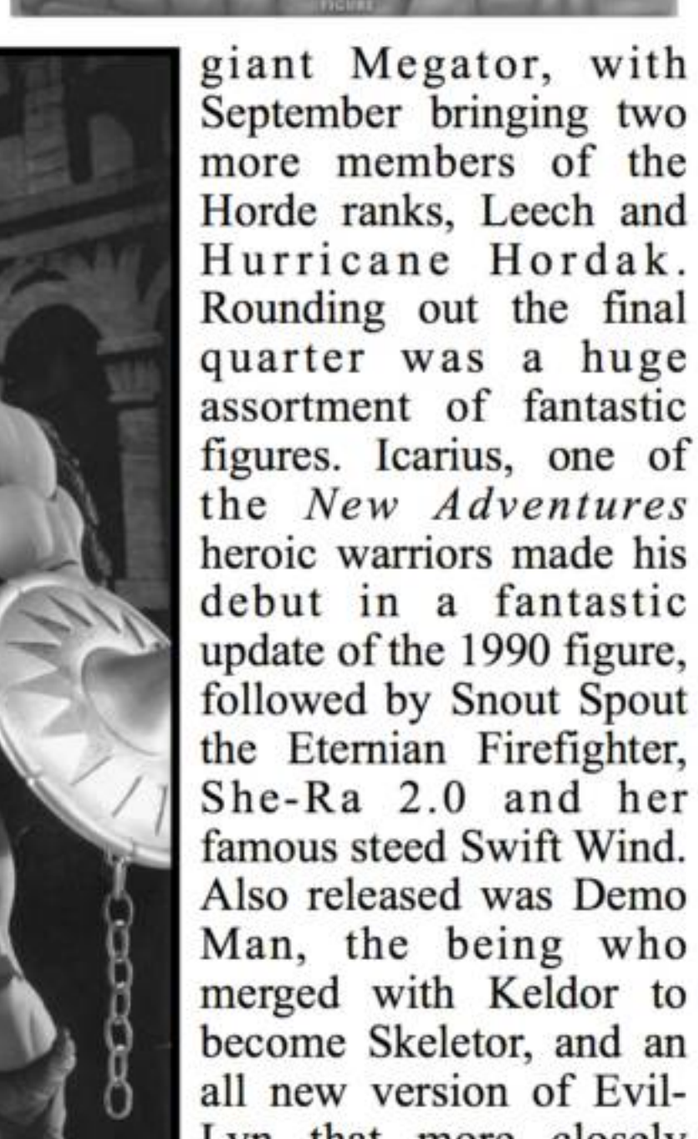
robot turned heroic warrior, Grizzlor, the hairy member of the Evil Horde, a repaint of King Grayskull, a second weapons pack, and bee warrior Buzz Off filled the remaining Mattycollector.com slots of 2010. Mattel tried to cross promote MOTUC at retail by pairing repaints of He-Man and Skeletor with DC Universe figures of Superman and Lex Luthor in exclusive Toys-R-Us two packs. The concept had merit, but was poorly executed. Fans of either franchise seemed unwilling to shell out $40 to get a repaint and a figure from a line they didn't even collect. Even more baffling was the packaging design, which failed to even mention the existence of the other figures available in either line or their availability on Mattycollector.com. The two packs failed to do what they were designed to, and after six sets, they disappeared. Fortunately, their coming and going seemed to have little effect on the line over at Mattycollector.com, which continued to sell out every figure offered. Still, the failure of the Toys-R-Us packs at retail did not go unnoticed by fans or Mattel, who now seemed a bit more reserved about the future and longevity of the line, but the 2011 line-up would put those fears to rest.

2011: THE BIGGEST YEAR YET

2011 proved to be perhaps the greatest year yet for MOTUC with an incredible variety of characters spanning the entire *Masters* mythos. There were more concept characters, more *Princess of Power*, more *New Adventures*, more beasts and giants, and even a vehicle! January kicked off with Vikor, the He-Man of the north, who was in fact the original He-Man concept figure. This figure is very Conan-like in appearance, and one can't help but wonder how MOTU might have evolved differently had this darker concept been used. January also saw the release of the very first army builder set in the form of Palace Guards. This fantastic set gave you enough armor, weapons and extra heads to create a veritable army for your display. Bow, a Shadowbeast, and club exclusive Preternia Disguise He-Man rounded out February's offerings. As before, this exclusive He-Man came with a map, this time of Etheria.

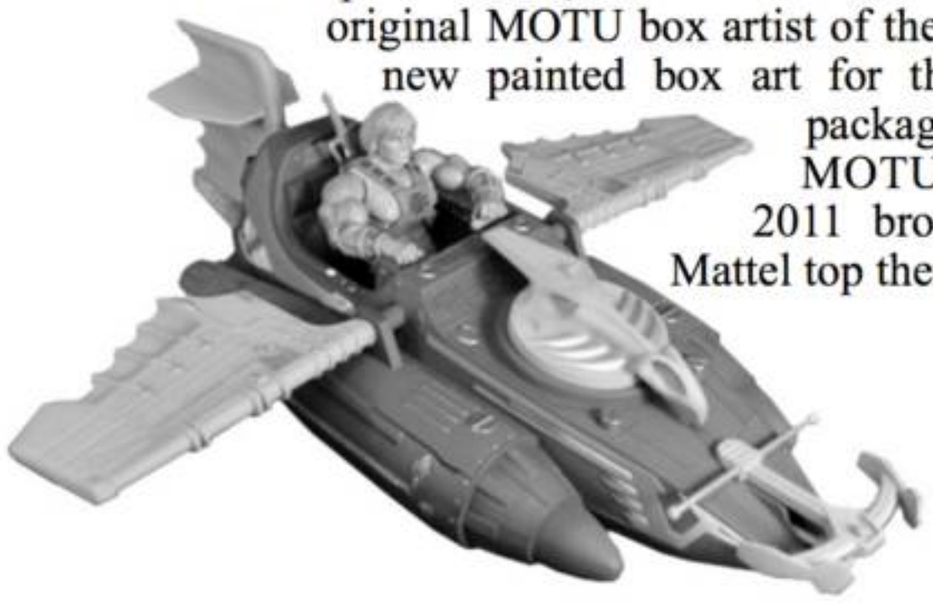
Vikor, the He-Man of the north.

March saw two big time favorites, King Hssss, leader of the Snake Men, and Battle Armor Skeletor. April was another big month, with a fantastic update of Sy-Klone, a new Castle Grayskull weapons rack, and the long-awaited Panthor. The Four Horsemen again did an amazing job on Skeletor's faithful pet, giving Panthor an all new head sculpt and war helmet to further differentiate him from Battle Cat. There were lots of great releases throughout the summer, including Catra, The Faceless One (AKA Evil-Lyn's dad), a new bikini-clad blonde Teela from the early comics, Clawful, and the best San Diego comic con exclusive yet, a fully realized Queen Marlena figure, complete with interchangeable outfit to transform her into Astronaut Marlena Glenn, and a bonus figure of Cringer (AKA Battle Cat in cowardly mode).



August saw the release of Man-E-Faces and the evil giant Megator, with September bringing two more members of the Horde ranks, Leech and Hurricane Hordak. Rounding out the final quarter was a huge assortment of fantastic figures. Icarius, one of the *New Adventures* heroic warriors made his debut in a fantastic update of the 1990 figure, followed by Snout Spout the Eternian Firefighter, She-Ra 2.0 and her famous steed Swift Wind. Also released was Demo Man, the being who merged with Keldor to become Skeletor, and an all new version of Evil-Lyn that more closely resembled her 2002 incarnation. The final release of 2011 deserves

special praise as one of the best toys from any line I've ever collected. I'm talking about the beautifully updated Wind Raider vehicle. MOTU has always boasted some of the greatest vehicle designs ever created. They may not be as well known as the Starship Enterprise or Millennium Falcon or Batmobile, but their bold, colorful designs and weird animal/machine hybrids set them apart from anything else ever produced in the toy world. They are not only unique, but uniquely MOTU, in the sense that in a world with barbarians, mutants, cyborgs, ghosts and monsters, pretty much anything goes. The new Wind Raider is a larger, more detailed replica of the original, with beautifully sculpted and painted details replacing the paper decals of the vintage version. In fact, there was not a single decal to be applied anywhere on this new version. Every tiny button and control panel is beautifully painted, and to top it all off, Mattel enlisted Rudy Obrero, the original MOTU box artist of the '80s to create all new painted box art for the Wind Raider packaging. With all the MOTU goodness that 2011 brought, how could Mattel top themselves in 2012?



The Wind Raider.

Draego-Man.

2012: THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY AND BEYOND

With the arrival of *Masters of the Universe's* 30th anniversary, Mattel has announced big plans for MOTUC including an all new three-part mini comic series to be included with upcoming figures, harkening back to the good old days of the originals. Mattel also announce the creation of six all-new MOTU characters for the 30th that really brings back the excitement and discovery of being a kid. Of the six releases, one each will be designed by the Four Horsemen, Mattel's MOTUC Brand Manager Scott Neitlich, comics scribe Geoff Johns, Mattel's design team, and two fan-created characters. This will be the first time such an important collaboration has taken place with any toyline, and really shows the level of Mattel's dedication to MOTU fans everywhere. As of this writing, the first several offerings for 2012 have been released, including The Star Sisters three-pack, fan favorites The Sorceress, Fisto, and Shadow Weaver, Kobra Khan, and Fearless Photog, the first of the 30th anniversary fan-created figures designed by Nathan Bitner.

Thunder Punch He-Man.

There are many more outstanding figures coming this year, and it looks like the line will continue for the foreseeable future with hungry fans clamoring for more. There are still so many great characters yet to be mined, including Filmation characters, obscure characters from MOTU's past incarnations in other media, as well as concept characters and more original creations. With such a rich history to draw upon, figures so magnificently brought to life by the insanely talented Four Horsemen, and a brand manager whose passion, excitement, and enthusiasm for MOTU knows no bounds, I would say the future of He-Man looks brighter than ever. I personally can't wait to see what the rest of 2012 and beyond has to bring. I want to give special thanks to the Four Horsemen, Scott Neitlich and Mattel for keeping the dream alive for all of us fans to enjoy, and to Val Staples, Emiliano Santalucia, and He-Man.org for providing a place where fans from all over the world can come together to share their love of MOTU.

As Dolph Lundgren would say...

Good Journey!

Visit *MattyCollector.com* for the lastest *Masters of the Universe Classics*!

THE MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE

AN INTERVIEW WITH DONALD F. GLUT

Before He-Man ever battled Skeletor in animated form the two foes had clashed in a series of mini-comics included in the original run of Mattel's *Masters of the Universe* action figures. The first four of these mini-comics, *He-Man and the Power Sword*, *King of Castle Grayskull*, *Battle in the Clouds*, and *The Vengeance of Skeletor* were written by Donald F. Glut and established the foundation of what the *Masters of the Universe* mythology would eventually evolve into.

SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE: When Mattel initially hired you to write the original four *Masters of the Universe* mini-comics how much of the story and characters had already been fleshed out? Did Mattel already have a structured outline, an early concept to expand upon, or was much of the story left to your imagination?

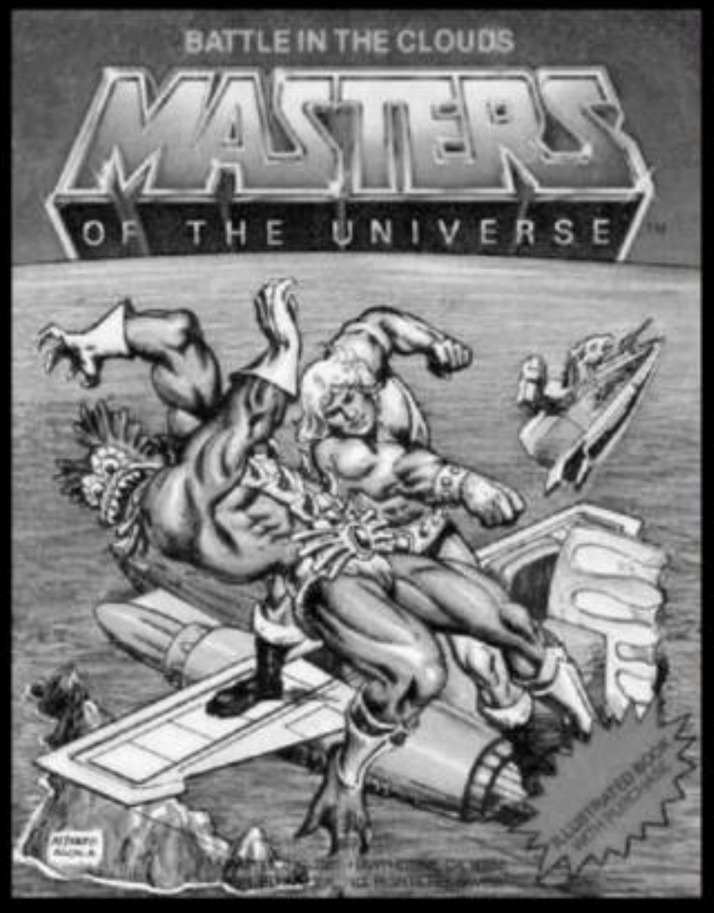
DONALD F. GLUT: I wasn't hired by Mattel *per se*, but by Western Publishing Company. Western, at the time, was publishing a lot of licensed books, comics, etc. owned by various movie, TV and toy companies. My main editor at Western offered me the gig. He showed me a set of about a half dozen Polaroid photos from Mattel, showing prototypes of various characters and also the castle, most of which were, at the time, unnamed. I recall He-Man and Man-at-Arms – and possibly Beast Man already having names, but not much else. Mattel sent notes to Western describing what the toys did. But the names of the other characters, the universe they existed in, their origins and powers, etc. were pretty much left up to me. And I was instructed to include in the stories how the toys and their accessories (like swords) functioned.

SM: Were you responsible for coming up with the names of Eternia, Castle Grayskull, and He-Man's Power Sword?

DFG: Yes, all three. The name Eternia was inspired by the title of the movie *Fantasia*. To my thinking it seemed to fit because the mixing of the primitive and futuristic – swords and fantastic vehicles, for example – suggested to me an "eternal" or timeless universe. Castle Grayskull I named after my then-wife's maiden name, Gray. I named the Power Sword after the Power Stone, a recurring plot device from some of the earliest Superman comic-book stories.

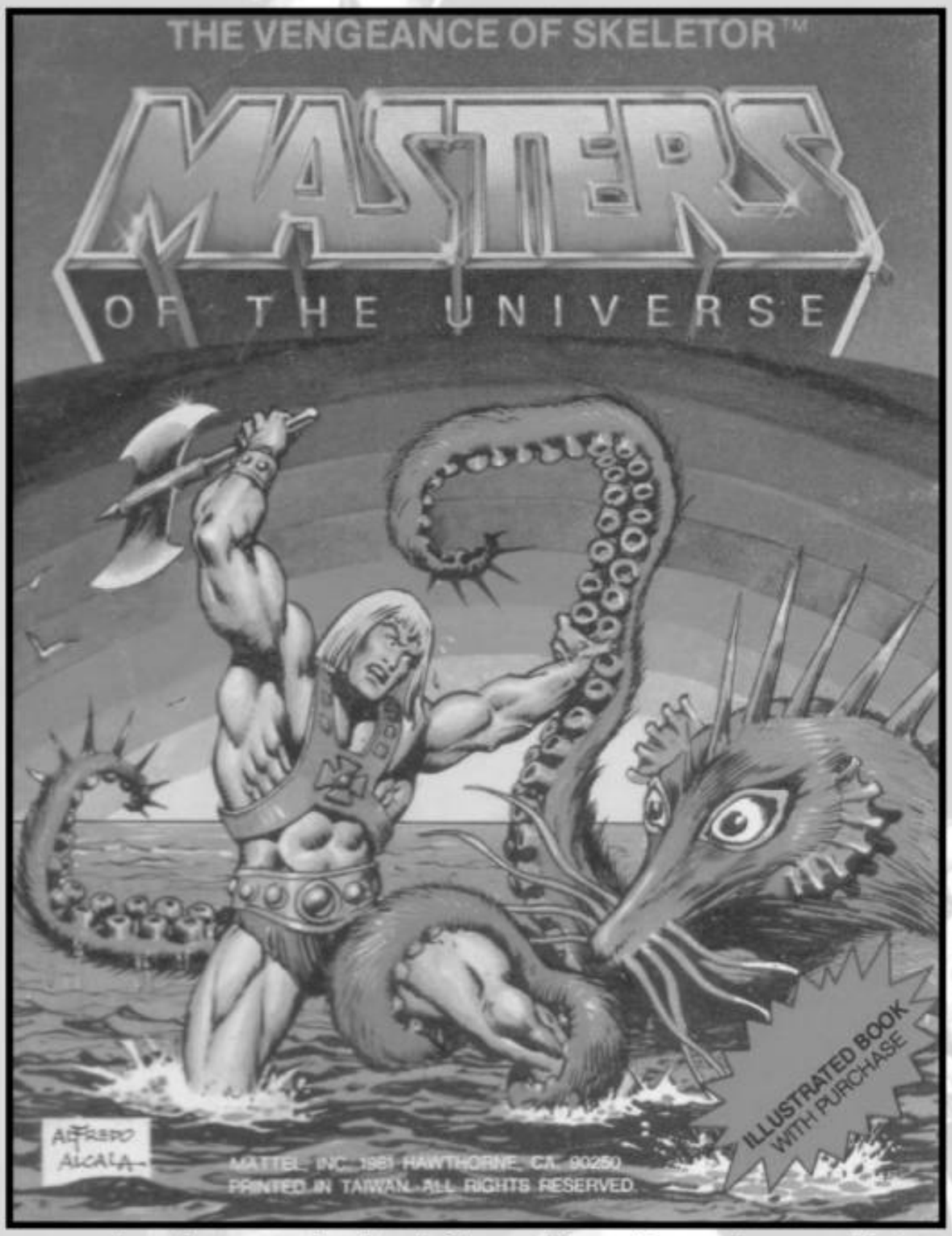
SM: This might be stretching it a bit (but considering your long-standing interest in science fiction, it might seem likely), was the title of the third *Masters of the Universe* mini-comic, *Battle in the Clouds* a reference to the 1909 silent sci-fi film of the same name?

DFG: Absolutely! And I'm glad (and very impressed) that someone finally picked up on that. I had (still do) an 8mm print of that movie, which I love. And since I wasn't getting an author's credit for writing those four original stories, I slipped in as many "in-jokes" as I could, in case at some future time I ever had to prove I indeed wrote them.



SM: There's been a long debate over Mattel lifting the He-Man action figure appearance from Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian. While working for Mattel, did you ever get the impression that they were intentionally pushing for a Conan-esque character for the younger age set?

DFG: As I understand it, Mattel



wanted to do an authorized Conan line of toys but couldn't secure the rights…so they just went ahead and did their own original character. But let's face it – almost all of these sword and sorcery/barbarian characters look and behave pretty much the same.

SM: After working on the four mini-comics did Mattel ever approach you for future *Masters of the Universe* comics?

DFG: No, after I wrote those four stories – and also a presentation including a whole batch of new characters – they never asked me to do any additional work, until later, when they hired me to write those God-awful *Wheeled Warriors* books.

SM: You've written animation scripts for a number of popular cartoons that are still very much respected today, such as *G.I. Joe*, *Transformers*, *Centurions*, *Scooby Doo*, *Duck Tales*, *New Superfriends*, *Challenge of the Gobots*, *Spider-Man & His Amazing Friends*, and many others. Back in the '80s did you consider writing a script for an episode of the *Masters of the Universe* cartoon?

DFG: Yes, I tried *desperately* to get on the TV cartoon show, but couldn't even get anyone on the phone. It was a time in my life when I was going through an *extremely* costly and emotion-draining divorce and, more than ever before or since, needed money just to stay alive. I was living literally at poverty level. So not being able to get on that show when I needed every penny I could scrape up was a very depressing experience, especially when you add to the mix the fact that I'd also had some solid history writing scripts for Filmation.

SM: While He-Man has become an iconic character in the United States, you've also written an un-filmed screenplay for an equally iconic character of Japanese origin – Ultraman. *Ultraman: Hero from the Stars* was intended to be a big-budget American feature film starring the popular fantasy character; can you tell us a bit about your work on the project?

DFG: Wow, that's a long story in itself. But basically, Tsuburaya Productions – which knew of me mostly from my novelization of *The Empire Strikes Back* – hired me to write a script for what was intended to be an American Ultraman movie. Again I was mostly left to my own imagination to come up with the basic idea and storyline. They paid me very well to write a first-draft screenplay. But then, as I understand things, Tsuburaya fell on somewhat hard times and

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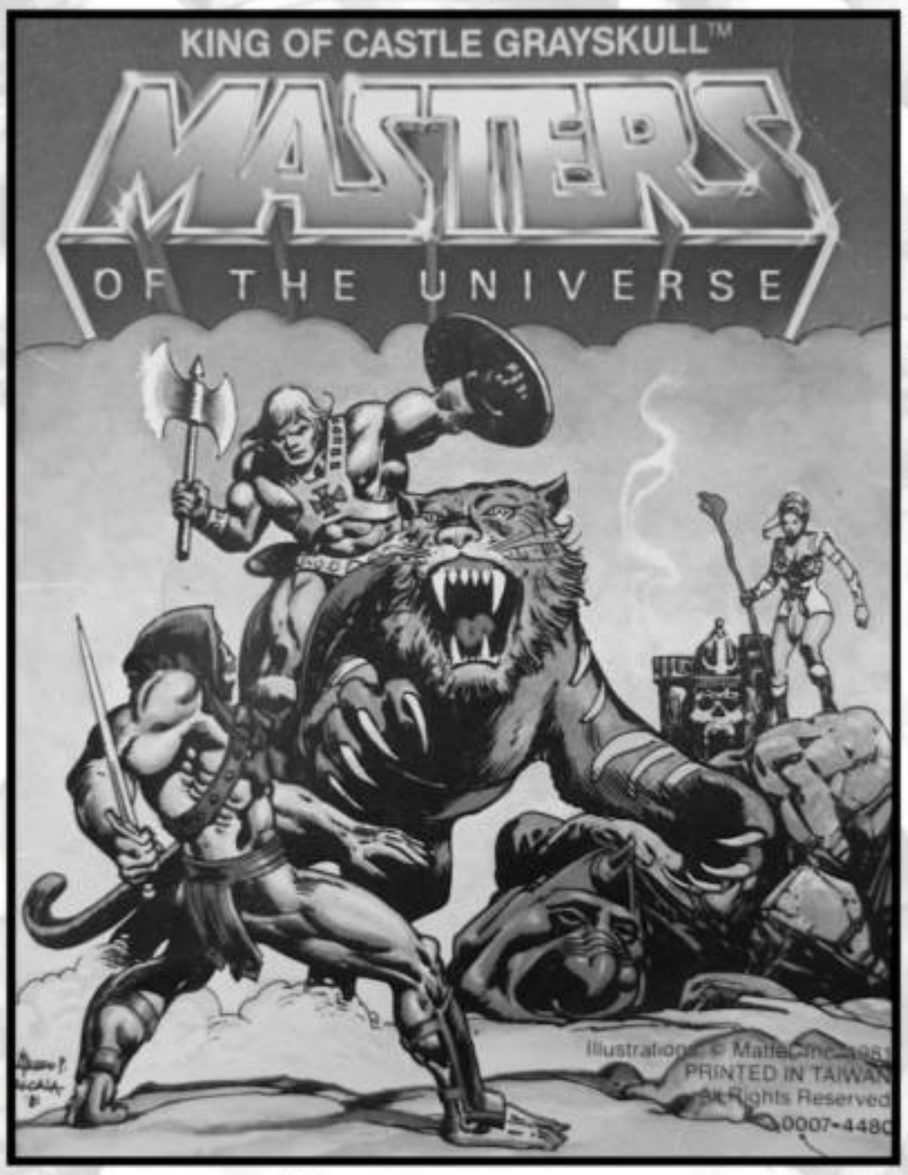
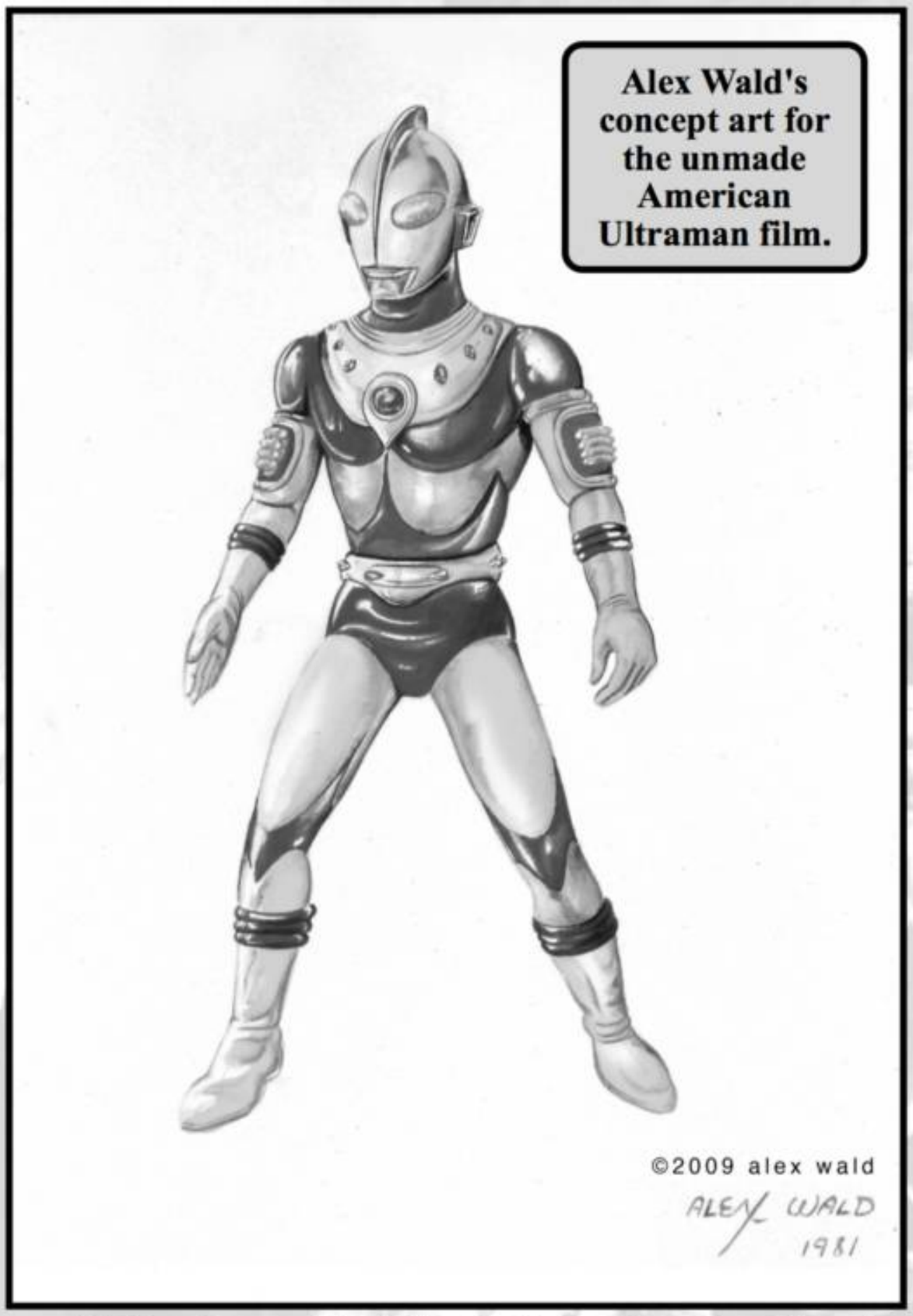




Alex Wald's concept art for the unmade American Ultraman film.

couldn't go beyond that. It was, however, a very fun gig. Imagine writing a script where giant monsters demolish cities and fight a multi-powered superhero!

SM: Through your production company, Frontline Entertainment, you've written and directed a number of films in the sci-fi and horror genres. *Dinosaur Valley Girls* (1996), for instance, has since become a cult classic. You've also worked with the late, great Paul Naschy (the undisputed 'king of Spanish horror cinema') in *Countess Dracula's Orgy of Blood* (2004). What was it like working with him?

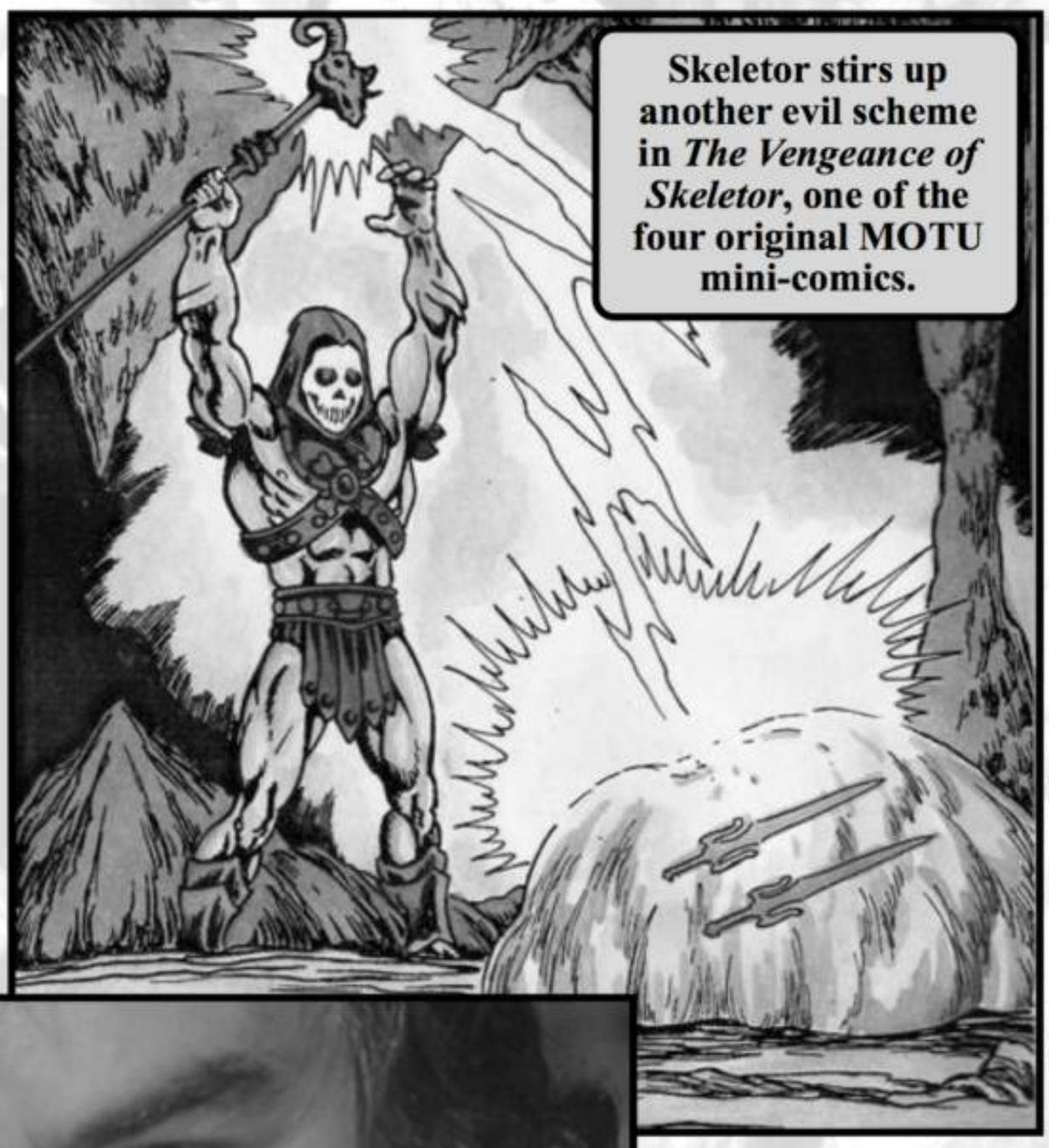
DFG: A dream and an honor. Paul was a very good actor who didn't speak English. But, sometimes through an interpreter or the intervention of his son Sergio, we communicated quite well. I've always been a big fan of Paul Naschy.

SM: You've applied your talents to filmmaking, television, comic books and novels (such as the novelization of *The Empire Strikes Back* which went on to be a best-seller and winner of the 1980 Galaxy Award). Do you have a preference of filmmaking (directing, screenwriting) over, say, writing a book or comic? Or vice versa?

DFG: No question about it, I enjoy directing movies best of all – and also playing music. I don't particularly like writing novels, and writing animation scripts was almost always "just a job."

SM: Are there any new projects that you're currently working on that you would like to share with our readers?

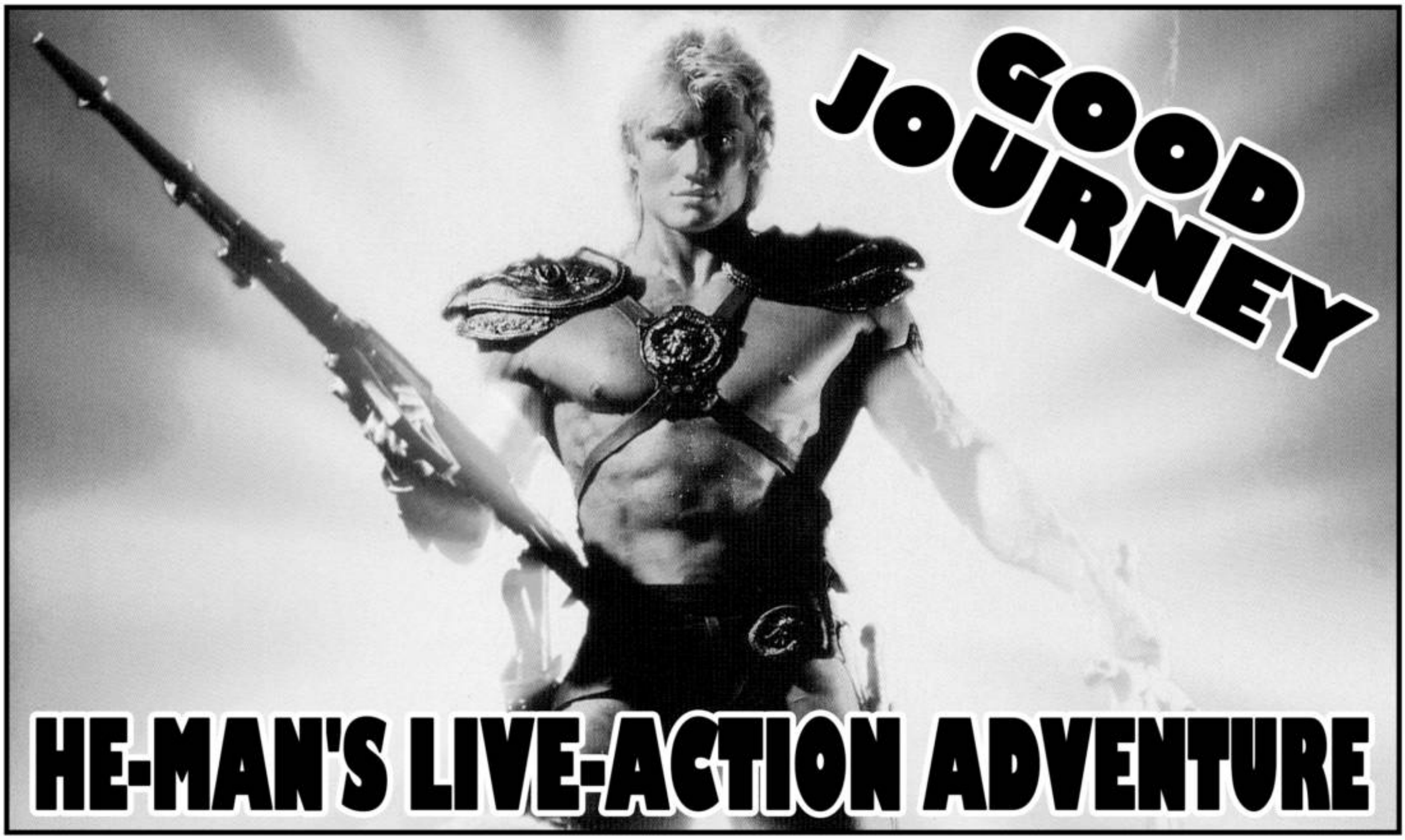
DFG: I'm trying to raise funds to make a sexy female werewolf movie…and still working on my new website www.donglutsdinosaurs.com. Other than those things, it's all pretty much "business as usual." And please also check out my other websites: www.donaldfglut.com, www.frontlinefilms.com & http://usersites.horrorfind.com/home/horror/moviemaker/homepage.html.



Skeletor stirs up another evil scheme in *The Vengeance of Skeletor*, one of the four original MOTU mini-comics.

Shadowland Magazine would like to thank Mr. Glut for taking the time to participate in our interview.

***Left*: The legendary Paul Naschy, king of Spanish horror cinema.**



HE-MAN'S LIVE-ACTION ADVENTURE

BY FRANK WARDEN

FROM HERE TO ETERNIA

1987. In retrospect, it was not a kind year for children's television. That fateful year would see the release of *G.I. Joe: The Movie*, wrapping up the *Real American Hero* storyline in questionable fashion. By November of 1987 the peak success of *Transformers* had also passed, resulting in the cancellation of the animated series; *Jem and the Holograms* would soon follow suit. Ironic as it was, despite many of these shows ending, the coinciding toy lines continued to flourish.

As far as cartoons were concerned, kids could still fall back on *The Real Ghostbusters* and *Thundercats* both of which were still picking up steam, and the unrivaled popularity of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was right around the corner. In spite of Filmation's *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* series being cancelled in 1985, re-runs were being shown regularly in '87 and new toys continued flooding the stores. By then the toys were becoming stagnant with retreads like Faker II and oddities in the vein of Twistoid – the occasional gem, like Scare Glow, became a rarity. MOTU fans were a dedicated bunch though and, regardless of no new cartoon or comic series to propel the franchise, the toy line was still making Mattel a respectable profit.

And then it happened during the summer of 1987…the *Masters of the Universe* motion picture was released. But did the *Masters* still have the power?

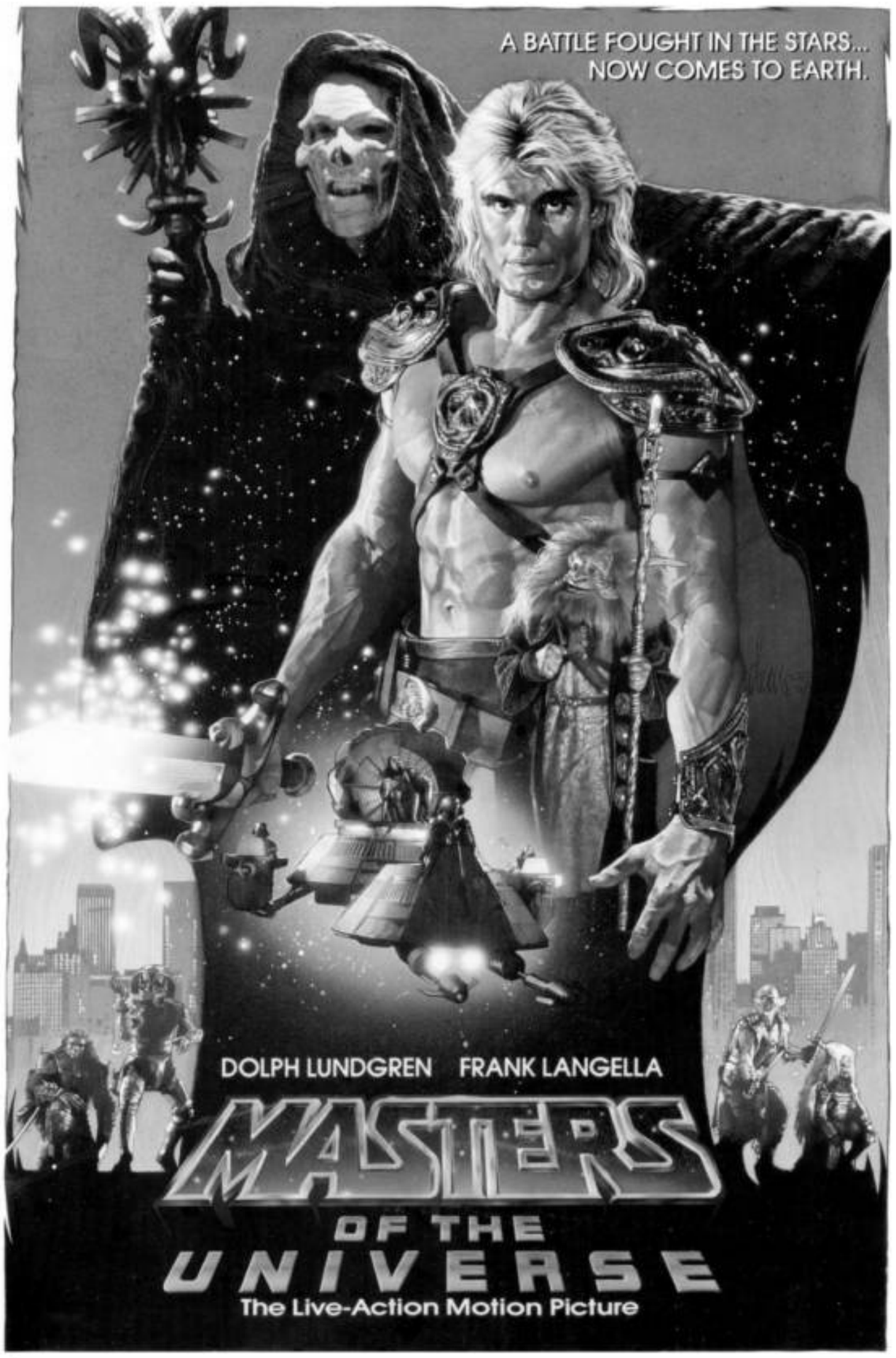
BY THE POWER OF CANNON FILMS

For children of the 1980s few events were more controversial in the history of the *Masters of the Universe* franchise than the 1987 live-action film. Before we look at the film it's crucial to take a glimpse behind-the-scenes and examine the rather interesting development process that led to its release.

By 1987 the MOTU property was waning. The He-Man craze had entered its dying days and the idea of a live-action big budget film seemed a little late in the game. Compare this with the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* – New Line Cinema released the original TMNT film in 1990, in the midst of the property's hugely popular toy line and while a hit cartoon graced the airwaves. The *Turtles* movie made a fortune and cemented New Line's place as a contender in Hollywood (the studio's earlier financial accomplishments mostly stemmed from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise).

At the time Mattel was interested in licensing the *Masters* property out, hoping that a film would boost sales of their toy line. No major studio stepped forward. Cannon Films – a production company notorious for their low-to-medium budget action pictures – expressed interest and acquired the license. *Masters* would go on to become their highest budgeted film of all time. Set at a $17 million budget, *Masters of the Universe* would eventually cost the modest studio $22 million.

On August 7th, 1987 theaters played host to what was


A BATTLE FOUGHT IN THE STARS...
NOW COMES TO EARTH.
DOLPH LUNDGREN FRANK LANGELLA
MASTERS
OF THE
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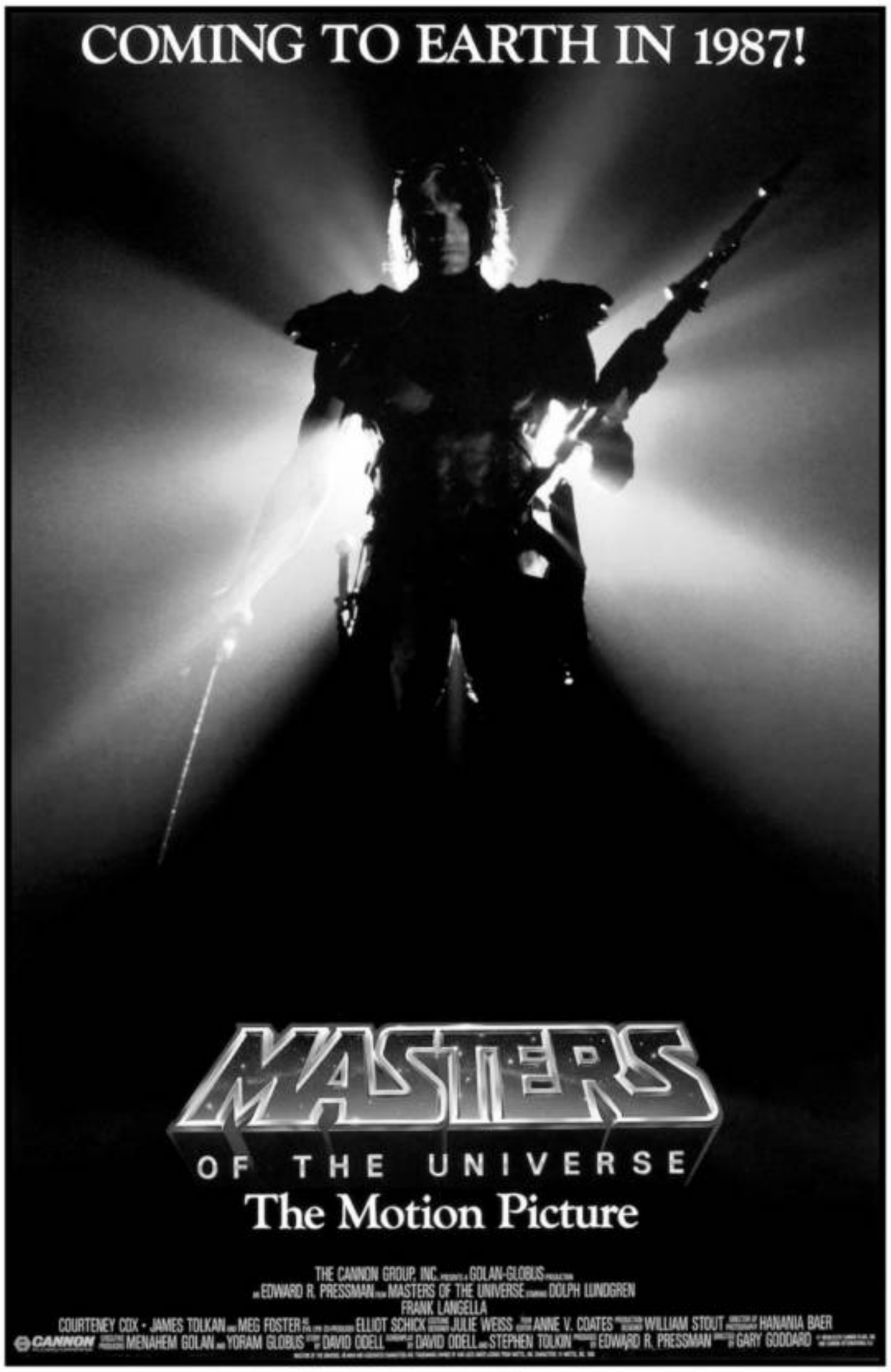
The Live-Action Motion Picture


COMING TO EARTH IN 1987!
MASTERS
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THE CANNON GROUP, INC. PRESENTS A GOLAN-GLOBUS PRODUCTION
AN EDWARD R. PRESSMAN FILM MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE STARRING DOLPH LUNDGREN
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CANNON MENAHEM GOLAN AND YORAM GLOBUS DAVID ODELL DAVID ODELL AND STEPHEN TOLKIN EDWARD R. PRESSMAN GARY GODDARD

A BATTLE
FOUGHT IN THE STARS,
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THE CANNON GROUP, INC. PRESENTS A GOLAN-GLOBUS PRODUCTION OF A GARY GODDARD FILM
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ELLIOT SCHICK EDWARD R. PRESSMAN DAVID ODELL MENAHEM GOLAN AND YORAM GLOBUS GARY GODDARD
CANNON

大活劇
SF
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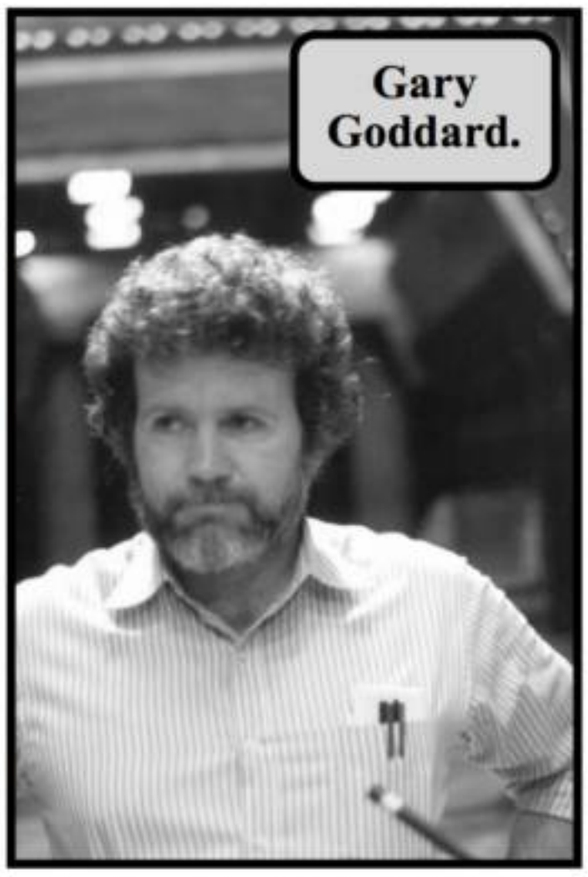
マスターズ
超空の覇者

Coming to Earth In 1987!
THE CANNON GROUP INC. PRESENTS
A GOLAN-GLOBUS PRODUCTION
AN EDWARD R PRESSMAN FILM
MASTERS
STARRING DOLPH LUNDGREN
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MENAHEM GOLAN & YORAM GLOBUS
CO-PRODUCERS ELLIOT SCHICK & DAVID ODELL • SCREENPLAY BY DAVID ODELL
CANNON PRODUCED BY EDWARD R. PRESSMAN • DIRECTED BY GARY GODDARD

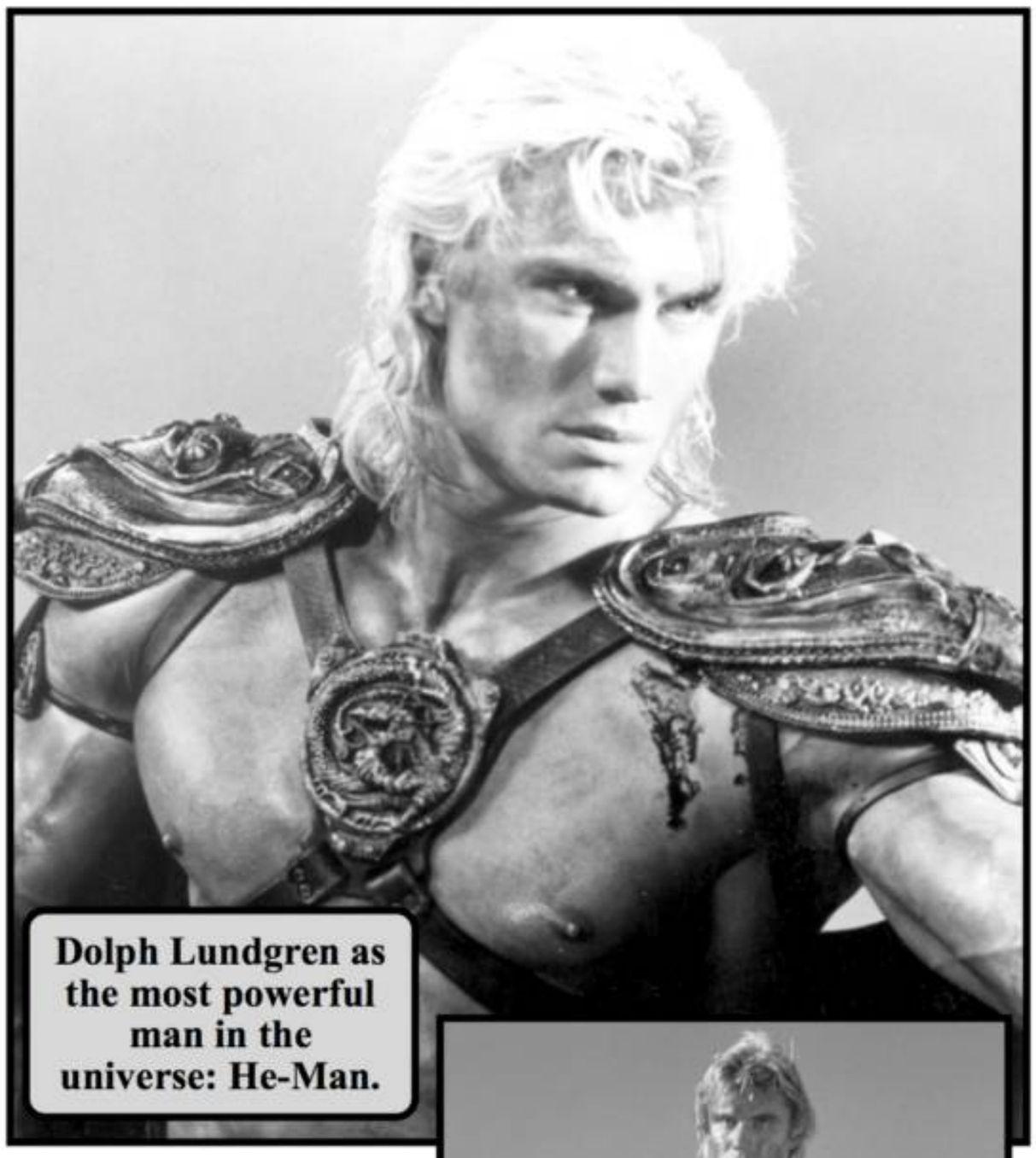
advertised as an adventure of cosmic proportions, and yet the film failed to make back its initial budget, dealing a crushing blow to Cannon Films and trouncing what little faith Mattel had left in the property for years to come.

DIRECTING THE MASTERS



Sitting in the director's chair for He-Man's big screen spectacle was the relatively unknown Gary Goddard who, at that point, only had a writing credit for *Tarzan, the Ape Man* (1981). *Masters of the Universe* would be Goddard's first and only time directing a feature film; he would later utilize his talents to produce some of the world's largest theme park attractions like Universal Studios' *T2 3-D: Battle Across Time*, *Star Trek the Experience: The Klingon Encounter*, and the James Bond motion-ride *License to Thrill*. Goddard was also responsible for producing the underrated sci-fi television series *Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future* – the first show to combine live-action, CGI, and digital effects. *Captain Power* was a case of being ahead of its time and only lasted one season. Goddard's other notable TV outing was producing the short-lived – and equally underrated – cartoon *Skeleton Warriors*, which borrowed heavily from the MOTU formula.

rades one can tell that He-Man is not only well-respected but a savior to the Eternian people. It helps that Lundgren wields the Sword of Grayskull with a refined skill and his thunderous battle cry of "I HAVE THE POWER" is enough to send chills down the spine of even the most cynical *Masters* fan.



Dolph Lundgren as the most powerful man in the universe: He-Man.

For children of the 1980s few events were more controversial in the history of the *Masters of the Universe* franchise than the 1987 live-action film.

STARS OF THE UNIVERSE

Dolph Lundgren heads the cast of *Masters of the Universe* as He-Man, his first role since playing the iconic villain Ivan Drago in *Rocky IV* two years earlier. Lundgren once called the role of He-Man his "lowest point as an actor" but has since gone on to embrace his contribution to the film, stating that it was "fun." Considering some of his other roles, including Marvel's 1989 attempt at *The Punisher*, one would be hard pressed to believe that playing He-Man was such an affront to Lundgren's career. It might even be argued to the contrary, that He-Man was the role Lundgren was born to play. He not only had the physical presence to fit the part but, contrary to popular belief, gives a superb acting performance as well. His lines are limited, but he makes them work – we sincerely feel that his He-Man is a heroic character, one who would willingly sacrifice himself to protect the universe from the evil Skeletor. Likewise, when interacting with his com-

At the other end of the spectrum, the evil lord of destruction himself – Skeletor, is played by the versatile Frank Langella. In the cartoon Skeletor is a shrill-voiced feeble villain unable to ever stand toe-to-toe with He-Man. Even his preeminent schemes to conquer Eternia are dubious at best and his characterization is often reduced to bumbling comedic exploits by the show's later seasons, particularly after the introduction of She-Ra's rival, Hordak. Not so here. Langella bequeaths his Skeletor with a sense of insatiable malevolence, exuding sheer menace and utterly dominating every scene he appears in. No longer is Skeletor an inept foe, but a genuine threat that has already overtaken Castle Grayskull and conquered Eternia in the film's opening minutes. While Skeletor's blue-skinned

appearance is fine for the cartoon, it would have never translated well for live-action. Langella is clad in an impressive black-cloaked wardrobe adorned with detailed accessories and light-up gauntlets – his face is not the simple yellow skull from the TV series, but a pale whitish visage complete with prominent fangs. One of Mattel's greatest crimes against MOTU fans was that they never released an action figure of Langella's Skeletor.

Frank Langella as Skeletor.

While Lundgren may have once claimed He-Man was a shortcoming in his career, Langella has gone on record saying that Skeletor was his favorite role. At the time of the film's production his son was four years old and would pretend to be He-Man – so once offered the part of Skeletor, Langella jumped at the chance. And make no mistake, he delivers. His portrayal of Skeletor earns him a place among the ranks of all-time great movie villains. His monologue alone, while transforming into the golden "God Skeletor", is a testimony to his fiendishly over-the-top performance. "The power flows... flows through me!" Skeletor intones before his assembly of minions and a captive He-Man. "Of what consequence are you now? This planet, these people – they are NOTHING to me!" Villains in most of today's films rarely get a chance to spout such lines.

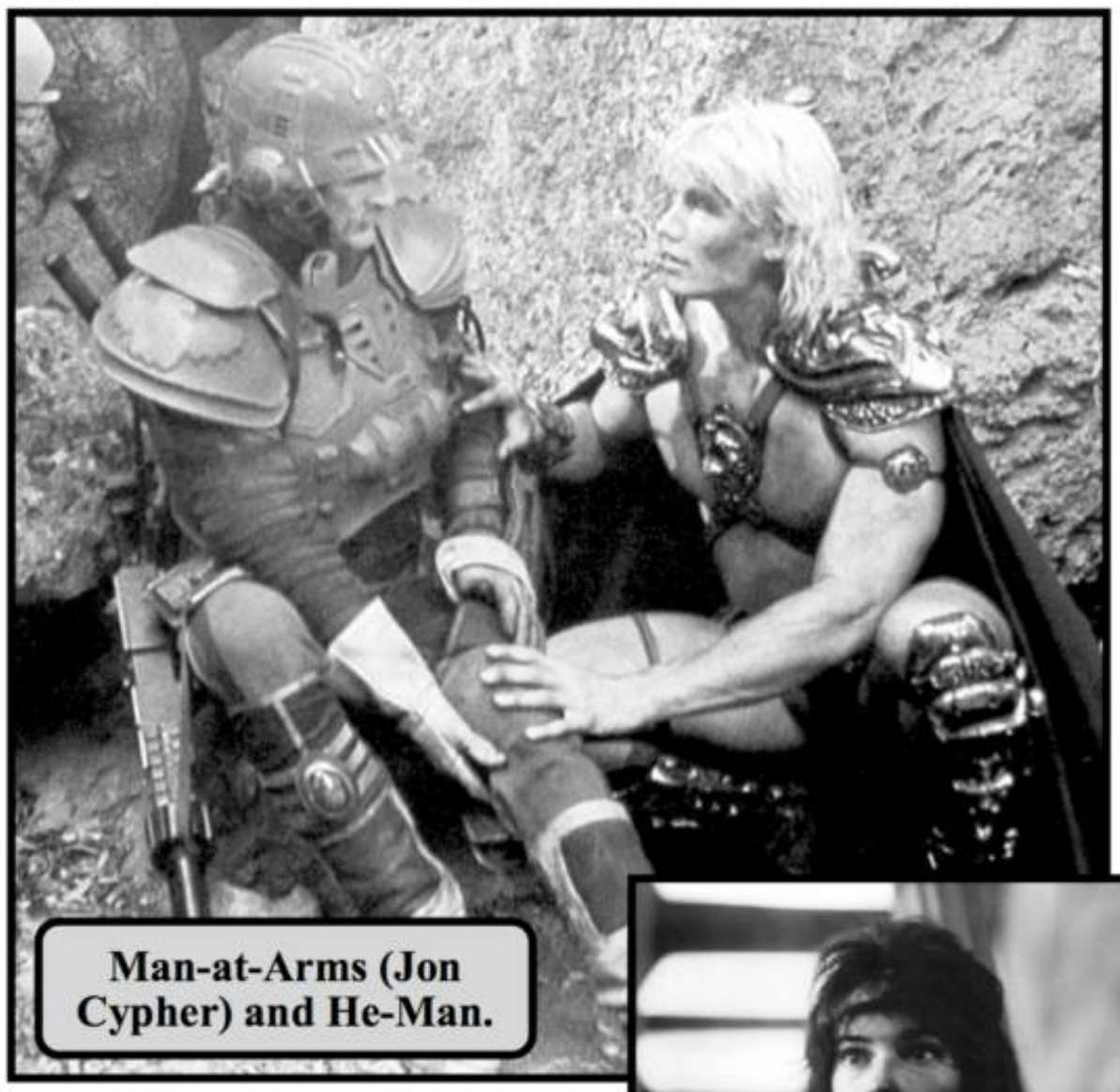
The diminutive locksmith Gwildor is played by the capable Billy Barty. As inventor of the Cosmic Key – a device that can transport its holder through time and space – Barty is flawless in the role. He applies his comedic talents well and never becomes overbearing or dilutes the film's action with senseless humor. With Gwildor, audiences don't have to endure the incessant annoyances of *Episode I's* Jar Jar Binks or the abominable Autobot twins, Mudflap and Skids, featured in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. Gwildor is *more* than simple comic relief, his Cosmic Key serves as the catalyst for the events of the MOTU film and he becomes an invaluable member to He-Man's cause. Considering all of this, it's sad to think that Billy Barty's performance in *Masters* earned him a Razzie nomination. Though little stock can be put in the Razzie Awards, considering these are the same people who nominated Stanley Kubrick as worst director for *The Shining* and sought to give Ennio Morricone a shameful nomination for his brilliant musical score in John Carpenter's *The Thing*.

Billy Barty as Gwildor.

"God Skeletor" in his regal armor.

Gwildor concept art.

Veteran television actor Jon Cypher plays He-Man's dependable ally Man-at-Arms while Chelsea Field fills in the role of Teela. Both are more than adequate in their parts with Cypher's Man-at-Arms a wise, experienced warrior and Field's Teela is a strong, formidable fighter well-versed with her trusty laser blaster. While Teela has a far different costume than her action figure/cartoon counterpart, it's arguably more battle efficient. Man-at-Arms' armor sports an altered color scheme in the film than his previous incarnations, but it's recognizable enough, right down to a liberal replication of his helmet.



Man-at-Arms (Jon Cypher) and He-Man.

Christina Pickles is commendable as the Sorceress. Her lines of philosophy put her at odds with Skeletor and allow for some intriguing banter between the two. The Sorceress' pure white, crystalline outfit is vastly reinterpreted from the bird-like garb of the cartoon – and for the better. Having her energy sapped by Skeletor leaves her skin aged and wrink-

led – a striking effect on-screen.

Heading Skeletor's army is Evil-Lyn; Meg Foster succeeds in offering a certain charm to the character. Alone, her natural eyes add an ethereal ambiance to the role and her intricate costume puts the action figure's outfit to shame. Foster plays the part with incomparable conviction and adds a new layer to the character by implying a romantic relationship between herself and Skeletor. However, in the end, her desertion of Skeletor is not out-of-line with her frequent traitorous depictions in the cartoons (both the Filmation and 2002 series reveal Evil-Lyn's desire to further her own ambitions) and the comics.

Above left: **Evil-Lyn (Meg Foster) secures the Cosmic Key for Skeletor.**
Above right: **Original Cosmic Key prop.**

Chelsea Field as Teela.

Skeletor's mercenary group, comprised of the reptilian Saurod, feral Beast Man, weapon-master Blade, and their leader Karg, are a visual delight and testament to pre-CGI make-up effects. Out of this motley crew only Beast Man was an existent character in the franchise. The remaining three were designed exclusively for the film. This left a bitter taste for some fans who had wanted to see series regulars like Trap Jaw, Mer-Man, and Tri-Klops in action. There has been speculation on why the "old guard" was replaced – it certainly wasn't to expand the toy line, as Saurod, Blade and Gwildor were the only MOTU movie characters ever given the action figure treatment. Budget concerns were another theory (we'll get into that later). Most likely, as Gary Goddard has stated in an interview, Mattel was overprotective of their characters and the only feasible way to kill off or injure certain characters was to create new ones. This allowed for the scene where Skeletor vaporizes Saurod.

Skeletor drains the life force from the Sorceress (Christina Pickles).

To the film's benefit, the less fantastical Earth-based characters were limited in number. Julie, played by Courtney Cox who at the time had only a few

television credits to her name, grounded the human side of the story. Her boyfriend Kevin (actor Robert Duncan McNeill would later find success on *Star Trek: Voyager*) is the reason for their contact with the Eternians after he finds the Cosmic Key. And finally, the perpetually irritated Detective Lubic is played by James Tolkan, fresh off *Back to the Future* and *Top Gun*. Even Lubic gets his share of memorable moments, none better than when he dodges a hail of laser fire from Skeletor's troops, snapping back, "Nobody takes pot shots at Lubic!" before blasting a handful of the armored villains away with his shotgun.

ETERNIA REBORN

There are many theories on why *Masters of the Universe* was a box office flop. As previously stated MOTU was beyond its prime and fans of the Filmation cartoon and toy line may have no longer been as attached to the characters as they once were. Moreover, those that *were* still fans might have felt alienated by the film having deviated so far from the source material.

For starters, the story was no longer set solely on He-Man's homeworld of Eternia – a realm that combines mystical sorcery with advanced technological wonders. Instead, Earth supplanted the standard Eternian backdrop for most of the movie's running time, to the dismay of some. In its defense, removing the action from Eternia and shifting He-Man's presence to Earth gives the film a distinct human element and does broaden the 'adventurous' scope of the story. No longer is He-Man fighting for just Eternia as he did in the cartoon, but he's now locked in a mortal struggle with Skeletor in an epic battle to save the entire universe!

Also, despite the film's "radical" setting shift, it wasn't the first time He-Man's exploits found their way to Earth. The *He-Man and She-Ra Christmas Special* had Orko encountering two Earth children and learning about the spirit of Christmas.

Another argument used against the MOTU film is the absence of Prince Adam who, when holding aloft the Power Sword, becomes He-Man. It could be contested that due to the dire circumstances of the situation, and the imminent peril that Eternia faced with Skeletor's conquest, there was no reason for He-Man to revert back to Adam. While this is just a fan's conjecture, a valid point can yet be raised: was Prince Adam really missed? In the Filmation show it was always a bit impractical that no one in Eternia could figure out that Adam and He-Man were one and the same, considering they looked identical! The 2002 cartoon remedied this by giving Prince Adam the voice and physical build of a teenager, contrasting greatly from his muscular adult He-Man form. The initial MOTU mini-comics that established the franchises' base mythology also never featured a Prince Adam character.

There's no denying that many of the characters from the cartoon and toy line are nowhere to be seen in the film. Considering the amount of characters featured throughout 130 television episodes and countless action figures, it's rather forgivable that the live-action film was so selective.

THE MAN-E-FACES OF THE MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

FILMATION **CANNON FILMS**

HE-MAN

MAN-AT-ARMS

TEELA

THE SORCERESS

CASTLE GRAYSKULL

THE MAN-E-FACES OF THE MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

FILMATION **CANNON FILMS**

SKELETOR

EVIL-LYN

BEAST MAN

The mainstay characters remain, as do their most important "accessories" like He-Man's Power Sword and Skeletor's Havoc Staff. Castle Grayskull is depicted in all its majestic glory and there are references to Snake Mountain. Even today there are fans that still have hang-ups about Stratos, Buzz Off, or Ram Man's absence in the film. Without debate, it would have been an impressive sight to see the likes of Man-E-Faces on the big screen, but the new characters like Blade and Saurod were equally exciting and it would be difficult to imagine the film without such memorable additions.

Ultimately, at the time of its release, if fans were able to separate the Filmation series and toy line from the 1987 film, Cannon's attempt may very well have been a financial success. The *Masters of the Universe* motion picture has all of the elements of a brilliant fantasy adventure – especially considering how much was achieved with such a modest budget…

BUDGET WOES

Many of the film's alterations appeared to stem less from creative liberties and more from special effects limitations inherent of the era and, foremost, Cannon's inadequate budget. But, even if the budget and effects *were* available, it would have been near impossible to render an authentic-looking Battle Cat in the days of pre-CGI. Sure, puppetry and stop-animation was an option similar to what was seen in *Star Wars*, yet it's worth mentioning that many of the larger creatures in George Lucas' original trilogy were of the slower moving variety. The Rancor that attacks Luke Skywalker in *Return of the Jedi* was an unwieldy, lumbering monstrosity – far from the agile swiftness of He-Man's trusty four-legged companion.

Battle Cat – a budgetary victim.

Orko was another casualty of the budget. Having a floating legless character would have demanded much from the special effects department. Bearing in mind how prevalent Orko was in the show, one would surmise that, if included, he would have been in the majority of the film. It would have been the equivalent of Slimer from *Ghostbusters* appearing in nearly every scene – an optical effect of nightmarish proportions in the '80s. Again, much like Prince Adam, was his absence really for the worst? After all, Orko brought his limited talents to He-Man's aid only on select occasions, not unlike Snarf from the *Thundercats*. More often than not, Orko was getting into trouble or being bailed out of it by He-Man. Not exactly the kind of character that lends itself to a feature film, in comparison to a half-hour episode. Gwildor serves as a stand-in for Orko and, through the magic of prosthetics and make-up, Billy Barty turns out to be a fantastic replacement.

Not even Orko's magic could get him into the 1987 MOTU film.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 91)

COUNT DRACULA

CHIPS

Dracula

Board Game

DENHAM '12

UNIVERSAL MONSTERS

THE MERCHANDISING ODDITIES OF THE EARLY '90s

BY RICHARD SHAPIRO

CREEPY COMMODITIES

Ever since Dracula first urged us to listen to the 'children of the night' back in 1931, the Universal Monsters have been an undeniable force to behold. After the monumental success of *Dracula* (little tidbit: the Bela Lugosi classic opened on Valentine's Day back in '31) Universal Studios went full steam ahead in an attempt to bring every conceivable monster under the sun (or moon) to the silver screen. What followed was a wave of man-made monsters, lycanthropes, reanimated Egyptian corpses, and gill-men from the deepest depths of the Black Lagoon. Between '31 and '47 the Golden Age of Universal Monsters had ruled the box office with an iron claw, until getting their final hurrah in 1948's *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* – which would be the last time Lon Chaney Jr. and Bela Lugosi would officially portray their respective roles as the Wolf Man and Dracula.

The silver age of the Universal Monsters arrived in the '50s with the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* trilogy. At that point, Dracula, Frankenstein, the Mummy, and the Wolf Man had been laid to rest due to ever-dwindling box office returns. By the early 1960s Universal had all but discarded their once-profitable icons of horror, leaving England's own Hammer Studios to pick up the slack for the better part of the next two decades. Hammer brought the nightmarish black-and-white creatures to the screen in riveting color with plentiful servings of blood, titillation, and violence.

Gone but far from forgotten, it was only a matter of time before the Universal Monsters were resurrected, this time finding their way into the homes of unsuspecting viewers thanks to the booming popularity of television. Just like in their onscreen adventures, the Universal Monsters were unstoppable – and their presence was only bolstered by the outpouring of horror related magazines like Forrest J. Ackerman's *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and the horror-themed newspaper *The Monster Times*.

With their legacy firmly cemented in the world of cinema, it seemed that the Universal Monsters had achieved immortality. By the 1990s Universal found that their classic creatures could be exhumed once again in a merchandising frenzy. However, this was far from the first time they tried to officially market monstrous goodies on store shelves. Back in the '60s there were the unforgettable Aurora model kits, monster bubble bath 'soakies', a line of Anchor Hocking drinking glasses, pez dispensers, Marx figurines, and a line of Don Post masks. The 1970s gave monster-lovers the AHI 8-inch Mego–style figures and Bend-Ems, while the '80s provided a larger assortment of Remco toys, the Rene D. Lyons porcelain dolls, and the Imperial rubber figures.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Few Transylvanian Counts have their likeness on such a varied assortment of merchandise. Collecting it all might even drain ol' Drac's blood bank! This fangtastic piece was done by the very talented Trevor Denham. Check out more of his art at www.TrevorDenham.Blogspot.com

1960s

Above: Anchor Hocking monster drinking glasses (1963).

Left: Marx 6" Frankenstein figure (1963).

Left: Frankenstein Pez dispenser (1964).

Below: Creature from the Black Lagoon bubble bath soaky (1963).

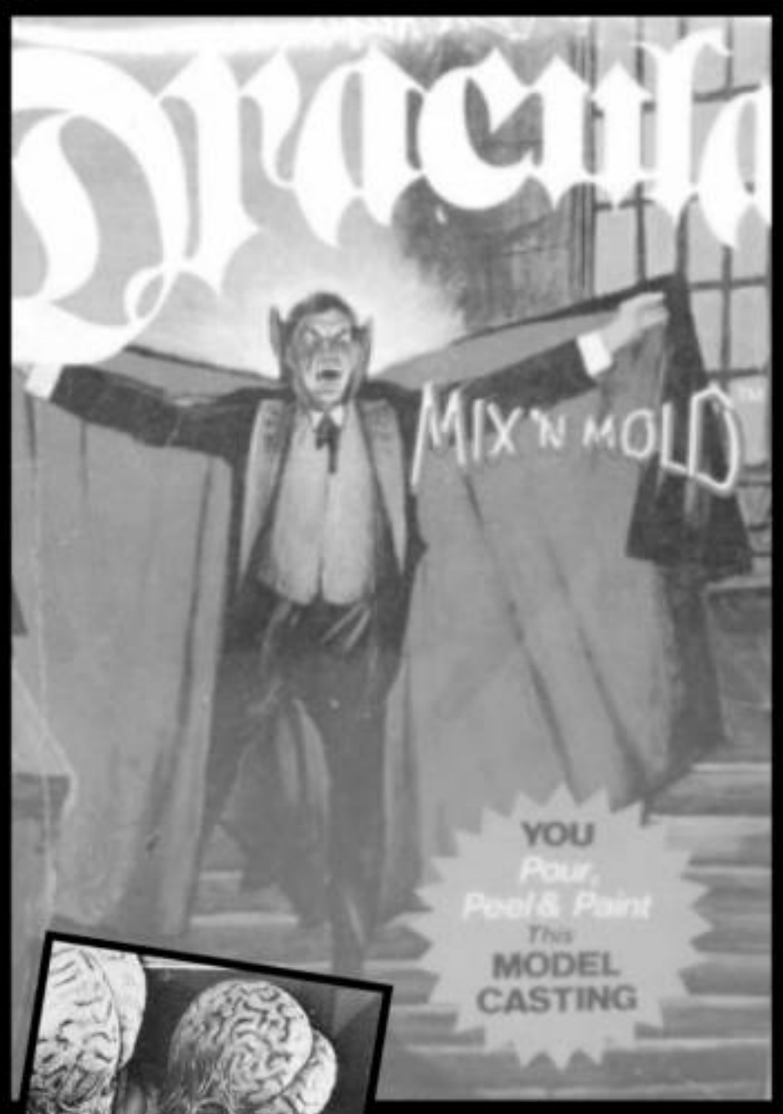
Below: The iconic Don Post Studios Hollywood monster masks (1963). The "Monster Calendar" advertisement below dates back to 1966.

Above & Below: Aurora Models' monster kits (1961-1966).

Above: Frankenstein and Dracula from AHI's (Azrak-Hamway, International) Super Monster Bend 'Ems (1973-1974).

Left: Creature and Mummy from AHI's Super Monsters figure line (1973).

Above: Frankenstein Flasher Face flashlight, manufactured by AHI (1979).



Left: Dracula Mix 'N Mold model casting kit released by the Catalog Shoppe (1974).

Right: Lincoln's Frankens-tein & Phantom 8-inch monster figures (1974-1975).

1970s

Left: You'll Die Laughing trading cards (1973).

Above: Universal Monsters metal lunchbox with thermos, released by Aladdin (1979).

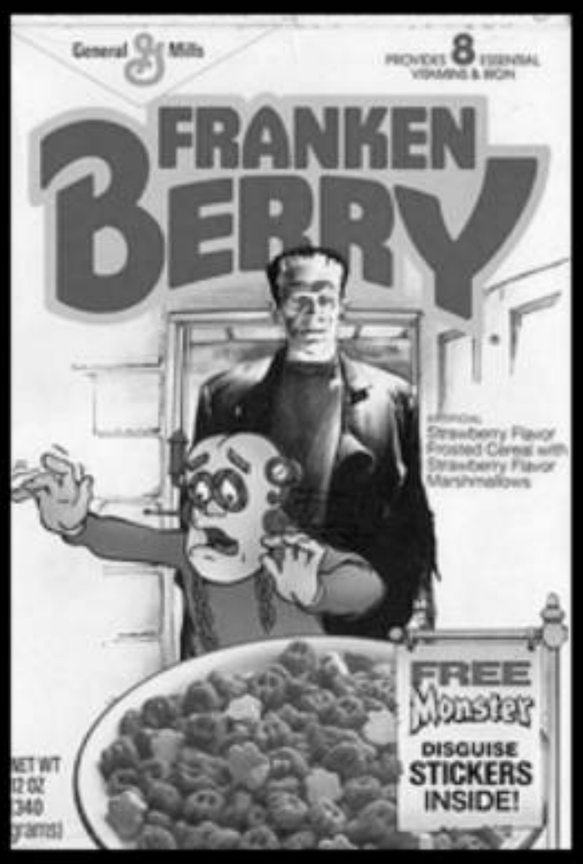
Left: Penn-Plax Creature fish tank ornament (1971).

Below: Creature AHI squirt gun (1973).

1980s

Left: 3 3/4-inch Remco monster figures with mini-monster playset (1981).

Right: Franken Berry cereal featuring the Karloff monster on the box (1987).



Right: Advertisement for Creature, Godzilla, & King Kong sparking wind-up walkers (1981).

Left: Don Post Studios Phantom of the Opera mask (1983).

REMCO

Above: Remco Frankenstein, Dracula, Creature and Phantom makeup kits (1981).

Above: Imperial Toys' Wolfman rubber action figure (1986).

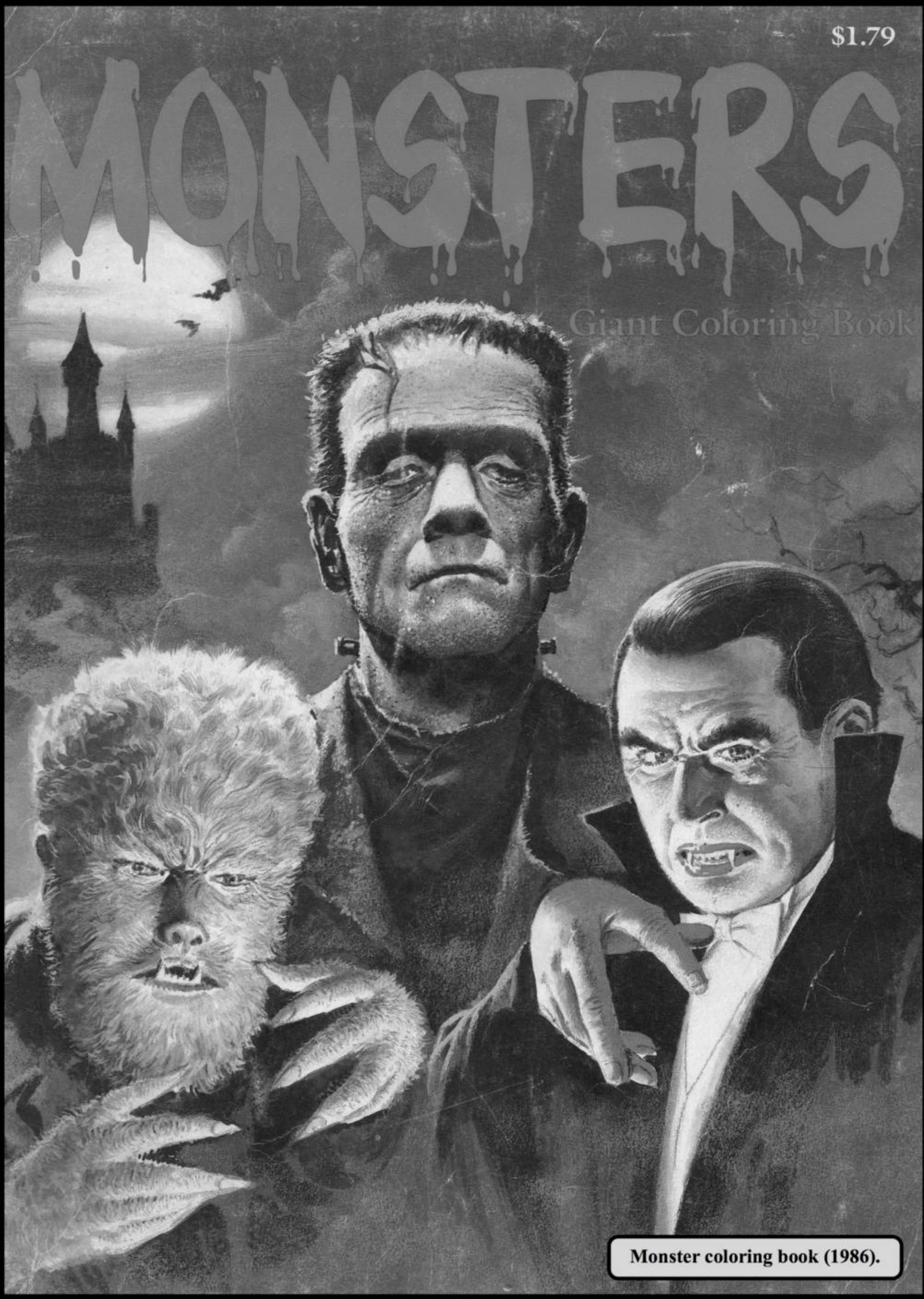
Right: Remco 9-inch Mummy figure in the box (1980).

Below: Remco 9-inch monster figure series with 'monsterizer' (1980).

Above: Remco Monsters At Home line (1981).

Above: Collegeville Frankenstein costume (1980). *Left*: More Collegeville monster costumes.

Right: Monster Hall of Fame stickers (1980).



Monster coloring book (1986).

Yet, all of Universal's previous merchandising efforts paled in comparison to what awaited in the 1990s, for better or worse. The '90s marked the first time Universal reached out to the younger age set *and* the baby boomers. (The young crowd would reap the benefits in the early '90s and the collectors finally received their recompense by the decade's end). Not since the '60s had such an unprecedented flood of Universal Monster products hit the market, sadly many of which were just plain mind-boggling…

HORROR OF HORRORS

In 1990, kicking off the decade, Universal Studios struck a deal with JusToys to produce an updated Bend-Ems line featuring their most celebrated monsters. Dracula, Frankenstein, the Mummy, and the Wolf Man were released to mediocre sales. I myself had the Dracula and Frankenstein Bend-Ems. While, to a monster-loving kid, figures of your favorite horror icons may seem like a dream come true – believe me, it's not. Not when the figures are Bend-Ems. For one, Bend-Ems reek when they first come out of the package. Not only are their "bendable" movements rather limited, their rubbery stench soon makes your entire toy collection have the foul odor of a rubber factory.

To Bend-Ems credit, the Dracula and Frankenstein figures *did* look decent – albeit generic and cartoonish. The Mummy was somewhat acceptable, but the Wolf Man was the unfortunate casualty, who resembled something of a cross between Charles Manson and a grizzled bigfoot. The lackluster character designs of the monsters were a common trend with early '90s Universal merchandising. Dracula suffered the most since Universal didn't have the licensing rights to Lugosi's likeness until much later in the decade.

NEON NIGHTMARES

Back in the 1960s the Aurora model kits were a huge hit with kids across the country, so it would only make sense for them to be reissued in the '90s. After all, what kid wouldn't want to build their own snarling, bloodthirsty, menacing monster? How about a neon pink mummy? In 1991 some genius at Monogram, the distributor of the monster reissues, came up with the questionable idea to re–release these kits as *neon monsters*, which could both glow in the dark glow and under a black light. That would be great, but back in the early '90s I didn't know many kids who had black lights and, if they did, I sure didn't know many who would keep them turned on day and night just to mask their pink mummy kit lurking in the corner. Sure they could be painted over, but that kind of defeats the point of the neon molding.

Perhaps the biggest insult of all was the box art for the Monogram *Luminators*, as they were appropriately called. The original Aurora kits each featured stunning box

Aurora Mummy

Neon Mummy

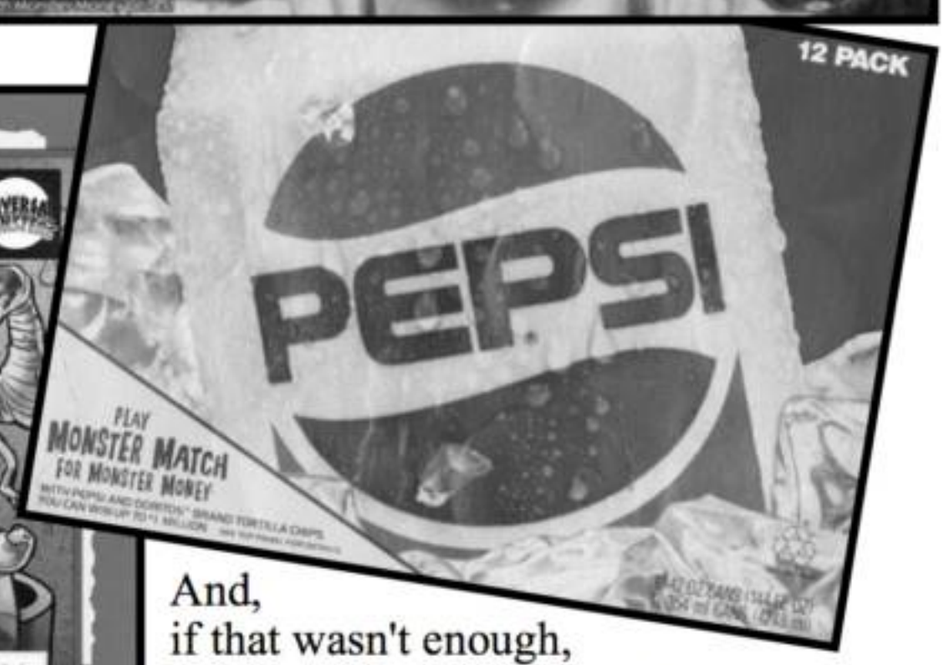
art that demanded attention. What did we get in the '90s? Hideous bright neon colored photos plastered against solid black backgrounds that served as an assault to the eyes. By 1994 Monogram would go on to release several of the model kits without the neon molding, along with some 'value pack' versions exclusive to Wal-Mart that included paints, glue, and a brush. Fortunately, Polar Lights was founded in 1996 and went on to release a majority of the classic Aurora monster kits with their original box art.

SAFE SCARES

Impel produced six trading cards featuring the Universal Monsters for a National Safe Kids Campaign promo in '91. In retrospect, were terrorizing monsters *really* the voice of reason when it came to safety? Case in point: on the Wolf Man's card (the back of the card explains the importance of wearing reflective gear at night) he is shown, with a seemingly devil-may-care attitude, *leaping* off a cliff. Sure, the cards meant well but, if you think about it, that's the equivalent of having a card of Jason Voorhees from *Friday the 13th* telling kids about the safety of lifejackets while beheading a camp counselor.

SNACK ATTACK

1991 would see Dracula, Frankenstein, the Bride, and all the rest were showing up on Pepsi products.



And,
if that wasn't enough,
by the mid '90s a brand of Universal Monsters cookies hit the shelves. Having had more than my fair share of these cookies, a few things can be said: (1) they had great images of the monsters on each cookie, which was surprising (2) it was fun reaching into a box of monster cookies and seeing which monster you were about to devour (3) they were some of the blandest and most tasteless things I've ever eaten – but this proves that most kids will gobble–up anything, so long as it looks cool.

The 1991 Impel National Safe Kids Campaign trading cards.

Even Doritos couldn't escape Universal's marketing umbrella. Each Doritos bag came with a monster sticker, which featured some neat artwork.

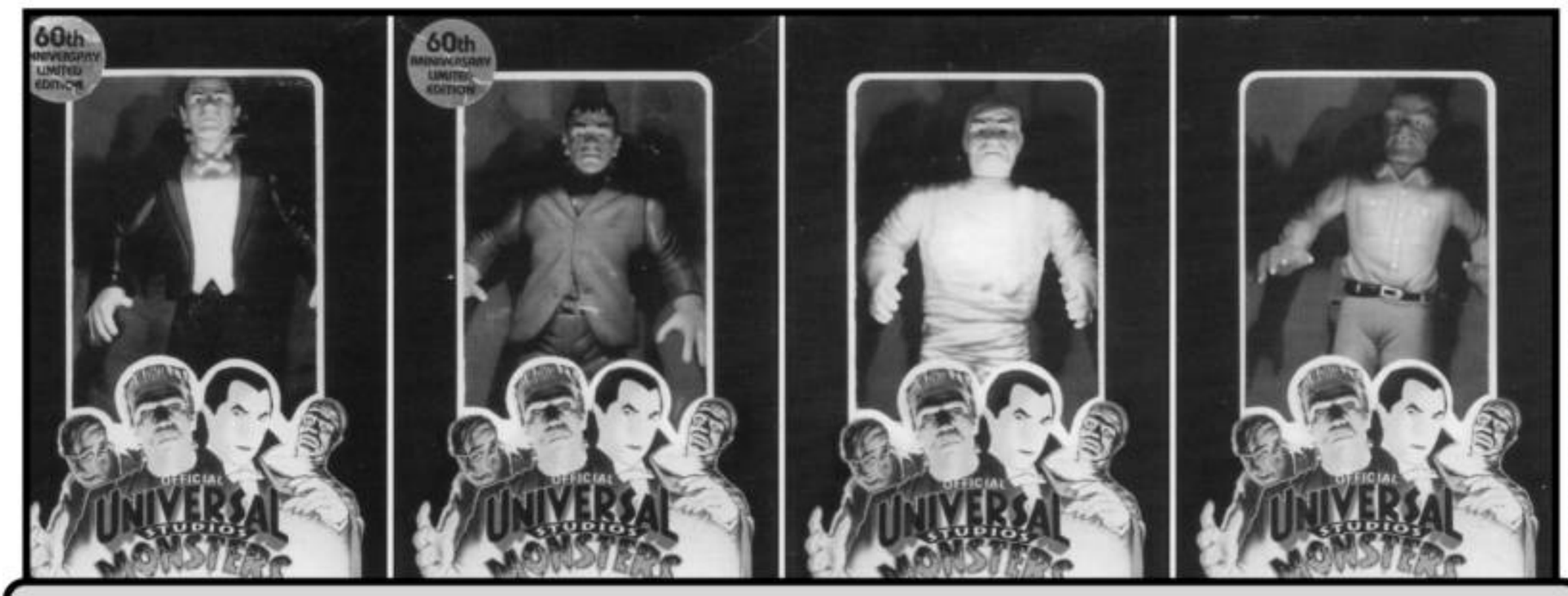
FREAKY FIGURES

In 1991 Placo released figures of Frankenstein, Dracula, the Wolf Man, and the Mummy. The designs may have been crude but I recall my excitement when first seeing them on store shelves. Placo had intended to follow up with the Bride of Frankenstein and the Creature from the Black Lagoon, but sales were so poor that they never materialized.

***Above & Right*: Drac, Creature, and Mummy Teclo motion-ettes.**

CARDBOARD CREATURES

Some odd things came out of the 1990s and pogs happened to be one of them. Remember the pog craze? For those who may not recall, pogs were little circular-shaped pieces of cardboard that were intended to be both collected and employed in some form of a game (forgive me if I'm not up to snuff on the details of pog playing). Though the pog fad swept the nation in the mid '90s, in truth, their allure has always escaped me. Even if someone were to collect these things, it would be impossible to ever have them all. At the height of their popularity, there were literally *millions* of these things being produced!



***Above*: The 1991 Placo Dracula, Frankenstein, Mummy, and Wolfman 10-inch figures.**

MONSTERS IN MOTION

In the '80s a small company called Telco had produced battery-operated motion-ettes of the Universal Monsters – though they kept them generic enough to avoid licensing issues. That changed in '93 when they acquired the rights to release Dracula, the Wolf Man, and the Creature. A year later Frankenstein, the Bride, and the Mummy hit the market. With the miracle of battery-power, these rather large guys (17" and 21" depending on the monster) would shake back and forth with waving arms and blinking eyes while sound effects played on. Teclo's designs retained very little resemblance to their on-screen counterparts, aside the Creature and from the Mummy – who slightly resembled Boris Karloff.

***Above*: Universal Monster Slammer Whammer pogs.**

Pogs, however they're played with, seem innocent enough, right? Wrong. These mind-warping, delinquent-inspiring little suckers were banned in schools across the country. Apparently, kids would keep the pogs they won in a game, so teachers came to view "pog playing" as a form of gambling.

Nevertheless, kids loved it and there was money to be made in the budding pog industry. Universal naturally cashed in with a series of monster pogs, released by Imperial in 1994. Each package came with a 3-D Slammer, 17 caps, and 1 glow-in-the-dark cap because who wouldn't want to play with pogs in the dark of night?

TERRORS IN A HALF-SHELL

Universal Studios' crowning achievement in the bizarre was their monster mash-up crossover with the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* toy line. The Playmates figures featured Leonardo as the Creature from the Black Lagoon and The Wolf Man, Donatello as Dracula, Michelangelo as Frankenstein and the Invisible Man, Raphael as the Mummy and the Metaluna Mutant from *This Island Earth*, and April O'Neil as the Bride of Frankenstein.

Burger King Universal Monsters.

As a kid I was crazy about the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and had more figures then you could shake a sai at. On that note, the idea of the classic Universal Monsters combining with talking adolescent turtles never really crossed my must–have list. The blending of the two franchises was just...strange. A big part of being a TMNT fan back in the '90s would be the playground envy of who had the latest figure. Not once, ever, do I recall anyone gloating about getting an Invisible Man Michelangelo or a blood-sucking Dracula Donatello.

The early '90s Universal Monster merchandise wasn't a complete failure, though it was far from a success. Though I will say some of the coloring books, puzzles, and the Universal Monsters sleeping bag still outshines even the most current of UM merchandise. Nevertheless, it's best to view the early '90s as a testing ground for some of the far better products that Universal released by the end of the decade. For example, in '97 the Burger King Kids' Meal set proved to be an impressive collection, considering it was manufactured by a fast food chain. Each figure came with a little glow-in-the-dark sticker and featured decent figures that certainly put the Bend-Ems of '91 to shame.

By 1998 Sideshow Toys were releasing a line of spectacular figures that proudly boasted the likeness of the monsters in contrast to the early 1990's bland designs. No longer were Universal's greatest monsters appearing on cookie packaging, Doritos bags, and Pepsi cans. Instead they were getting the respect they deserved with United States Postal Service stamps. Overall, the early '90s was an odd time for horror toys in general, just look at the failed *Nightmare On Elm Street* Matchbox toy line (another article for another time) but at least some good came out of these mistakes as the late '90s proved.

Above: **Dark Horse Comics' 48-page movie adaptations of the classic Universal Monster films (1993).**

***Left*: Universal Monsters sleeping bag and pillow set (1991).**

***Above*: Golden sticker book (1991).**

***Above & Below*: Dracula and Frankenstein frame tray puzzles (1991).**

***Left*: Monster flicker stickers (1991).**

***Above*: Creature 200-piece puzzle (1990).**

1990s

***Left*: Wolf Man water squirter (1991).**

***Right*: Mummy grow monster (1991).**

***Right*: Frankenstein flashlight keychain (1991).**

***Left*: Wolf Man makeup kit with fangs (1991).**

***Above*: Signed and numbered portfolio with artwork (1991).**

***Right*: Wolfman and Mummy slide puzzles (1991).**

Above: Frankenstein and Creature iron-on transfers (1991).

Below: Mark & See trivia book with magic marker (1991).

Above: Press kit for the Creature from the Black Lagoon pinball game (1995).

Right: Dracula face lite flashlight (1991).

Right: Universal Monsters gift wrapping (1991).

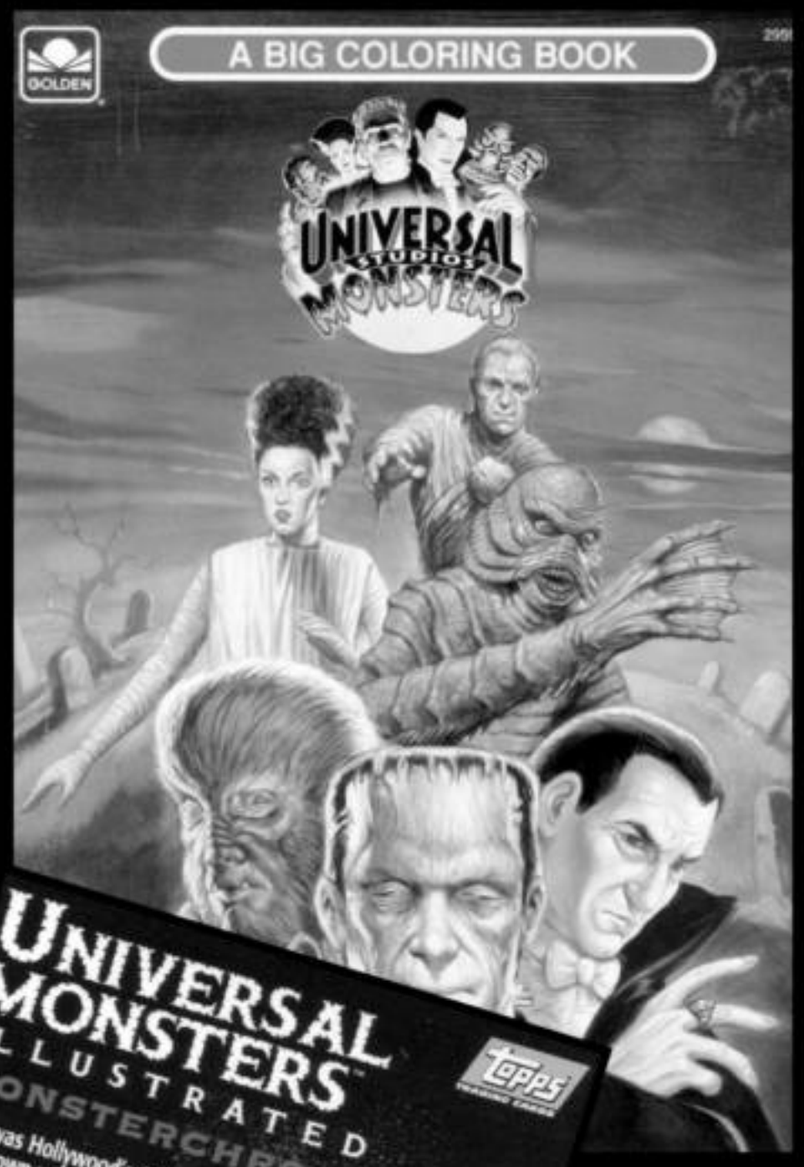
Above: Frankenstein hand-held video game (1994).

Below: Rubies Wolf Man child costume (1993).

Below: Paint 'N' Marker book (1991).

Above: Napkins (1991).

Right: Party Pak, including paper plates, cups, and napkins (1991).



Left: Coloring book published by Golden (1991).

Above: Mummy tin wind-up figure (1991).

Above: Universal Monsters Illustrated Monsterchrome trading cards (1994).

Above: Classic Movie Monsters stamps (1996).

Above: Home video advertisement for Universal's Classic Collection (1995).

Below: Wolfman paddle ball (1991).

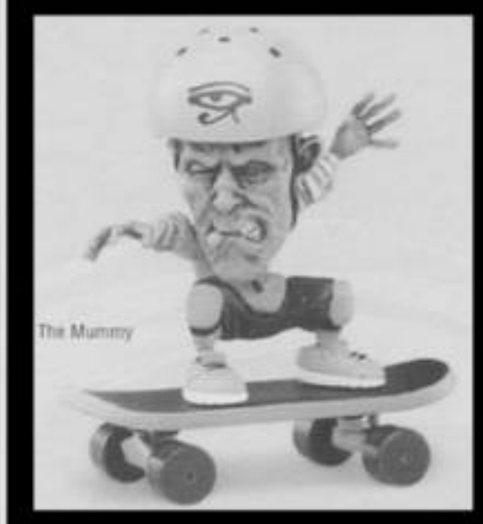
Below: Frankenstein VHS (1991).

Left: Mummy glow-in-the-dark watch (1991).

Below: Creature waterball (1991).

Right: 12-inch Montser Collecti-on three pack (1997).

***Left*: Hasbro Invisible Man 12-inch figure (1997).**



***Above*: Sideshow Toys' Little Big Head Mummy Monster Shredder (1999).**

***Right*: Hasbro 12-inch Bride of Frankenstein figure (1998).**

***Below*: Sideshow Toys' Little Big Head Creature keychain (1999).**

***Right*: Sideshow 8-inch Frankenstein figure (1999).**

***Right*: Horizon Model's Creature and Frank-enstein vinyl kits (1996).**

***Below*: Polar Lights' Mummy's Chariot (1997).**

***Left*: Set of 30 Universal Monsters Valentine's Day cards (1997).**

***Left*: Sideshow Toys' Phantom of the Opera 8-inch action figure (1999).**

***Right*: Universal Monsters chess set (1999).**

***Below*: Hasbro Creature 12-inch figure (1997).**

***Above*: Universal Studios exclusive Metaluna Mutant costume (1990).**

***Below*: Don Post calendar mask reproductions (1998).**

WHERE HAVE ALL THE MOVIES GONE (ON TV)?

BY JOSH HADLEY

I just turned 37 years old and I grew up watching movies, both during the video boom as well as on TV. When I say TV I mean broadcast TV, not HBO or Cinemax (although they were a great place for movies in the '80s), I mean over the air channels – the kind that you had to get extra tin foil for the antennae of your set.

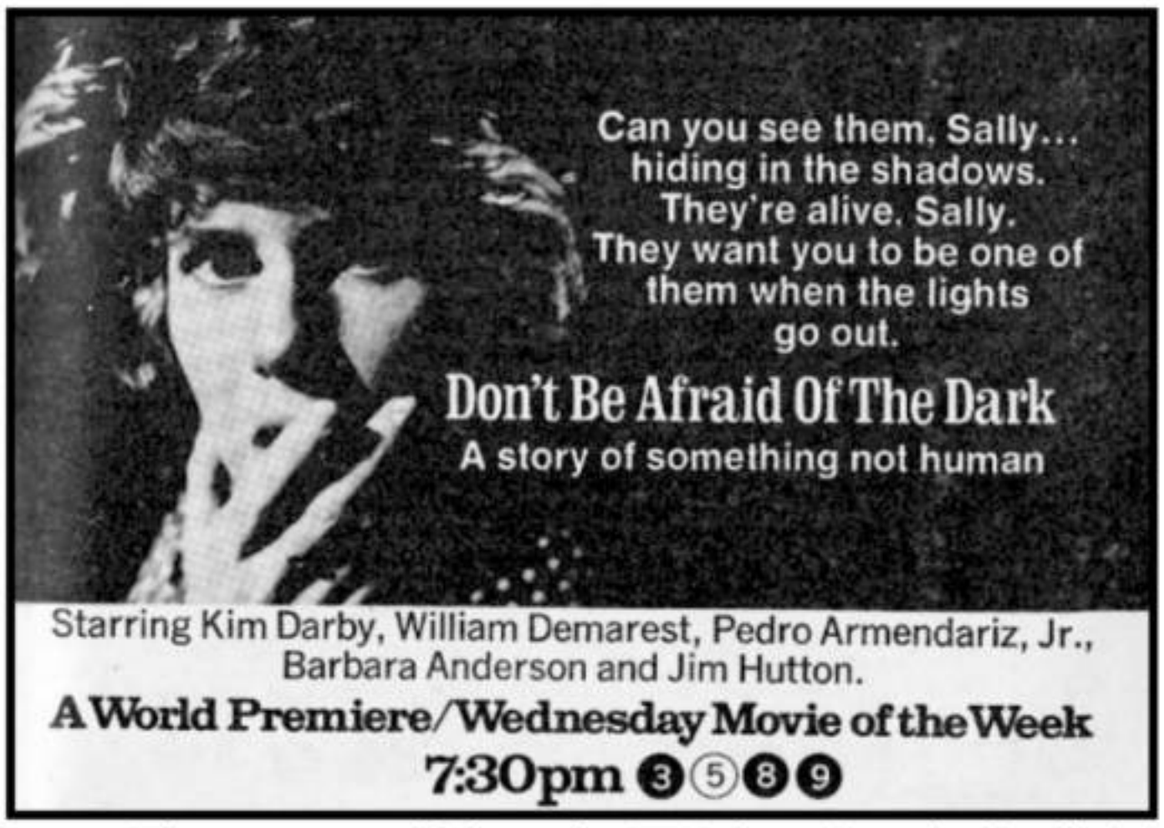
A little history before I get too deep into this. When TV first came onto the scene there were far too many hours to fill versus the number of TV programs there were. Universal and other studios opened their film vaults and sold their movies to TV stations all over the United States to fill those late night hours (this is most famous as the Shock Theatre package but other studios followed suit and opened their vaults as well). All of a sudden if you missed seeing *Dracula* in the theater, either from not being born yet (or maybe for other reasons), now it was on your TV, coming into your home for FREE – all you had to do was convince your mom to let you stay up late (the horror and sci-fi movies tended to be relegated to the late night hours or Saturday afternoons). This also brought us the first horror hosts, a nice jocular person that hangs out and watches the movie alongside you, even the bad ones.

The Shock Theatre package was a HUGE success and for a long, long time horror and sci-fi movies were a staple of not only Prime Time television but of "filler" (for lack of a better term) for independent stations who needed those afternoon and late night slots filled. Cable would adapt this ideal too but I will get into that later. Indy stations would make grand ratings on movies in the afternoons and overnights, with or without a host and soon it became the norm.

Now here I am more or less focusing on the horror and sci-fi movies, but all kinds of films littered the wasteland that was 3am local TV. Alongside the Hammer flicks and the Italian *Star Wars* and *Alien* knock offs you had Westerns, Crime Stories, Love Stories, Murder Mysteries, Kung-Fu, Blaxploitation films and so on. Every genre was represented between 1am and 6am on a weekday. The way it usually worked for the station was, they would secure some kind of sponsor or ad buy (usually a local business like an "Insane Freddie's World Of Hot Stereos" or "Jack Flack's Palace Of Slightly Scratched Records") and that sponsor would pay for his ads to run in that slot regardless of what was playing there, assuming it got a specific rating share. Then the TV station would purchase a film package from a distributor and that was always kind of a crapshoot as most packagers wouldn't just sell you the movies you WANT, you have to take everything. Say you wanted just the Hammer *Dracula* or *A Fistful Of Dollars*, well you also had to take *Black Belt Jones, Monstroid* and some french love story dubbed. Obviously you highlight the films you wanted but what do you do with the others? Throw them on at 3am and see what happens. Well, what happened was these films would get great ratings and the TV station mucky mucks would be floored. How the hell can *Soul Brothers Of Kung Fu* get a 3 share? Pretty soon the suit monkeys found that there was a huge audience late at night and even with cable starting to penetrate into peoples brains like Elmer from *Brain Damage*, local late night TV had huge success. Partly due to the fact that it was free and, an interesting thing the

local TV packagers did, which I am not sure was intentional, was to have a completely different slate of movies than the cable TV packagers. A local TV station would have movies that would never show up on HBO, TNT or A&E and that gave the locals a monster advantage. They used to promote the hell out of something like *Horror Express* or *Them* coming on "Thursday Night at 1am."

Now, I will grant that some of the movies the locals got were originally hard R movies and were edited but I will be honest with you, the local TV versions were more smooth with the edits than AMC, FMC, TNT or any of the cable nets. I think I watched dozens of Hammer films on local TV before I ever knew that these originally had copious amounts of nudity, same with some of the Italian movies, plus with those, the fact they are dubbed anyway meant you never noticed the replacement of the swears.



Then you would have the TV show "movies" which were usually done when a TV series was popular but did not have enough episodes to syndicate. They would edit together two episodes of the show (most times using two-part episodes but not always) and re-title it as a movie. *Space 1999*, *Kolchak The Night Stalker* and *Battlestar Galactica* are three examples (and in the case of *Kolchak*, they put in new footage to make it seem like the episodes were connected). These movie versions were very popular on the late night local circuit, and they don't normally show up on DVD releases.

Another great thing about these movies on local TV were the prints, they were damaged and washed out and I loved that. I know, I know, preferring the movies to be full frame, washed out, scratched and mono sounds odd, but go with me here for a moment. When you are watching *Raiders Of Atlantis* or *Jennifer The Snake Goddess*, be honest now, doesn't the movie just feel... I don't know... OFF, when you seen them widescreen, remastered, in hi-fi and in a clean print? To me movies like these, even today, give off that 3AM LOCAL TV vibe and for that, you need a mono, full frame, scratched, washed out print.

The Networks used to show movies all the time too, in Prime Time even, like NBC Sunday Night At The Movies or CBS Mystery Theater. In the days before home video, and prior to cable being inexpensive enough for the masses, after a studio movie left the theater, it would show up on Network TV and get a huge rating to boot. *James Bond* movies, the *Star Trek* films and hell, when *Star Wars* made it's TV debut (a year before it would be available on home video) it was the definition of an EVENT (Mark Hamill as host, a documentary, fan reaction and it was a big damn deal). The Networks don't seem to show movies in Prime Time anymore.

Why don't many local channels do this anymore? One word (and a made up word too), INFOMERCIALS. After these blights on the TV landscape started to show up, TV programmers said "why should we beg Sleazy Charlie for his business when we make MORE money, spend LESS time and don't even have to buy a movie anymore" and that was it for us movie fans. Infomercials were faster, and more profitable for the stations and those things spread faster than a virgin on prom night. Movies started to get phased out and now, good luck finding the kinds of movies WE love on a local station (or even cable for that matter). Sure, stations still have some movies on the weekend afternoons, but showing *Total Recall* or *Mission Impossible* or *SWAT* is not the same as showing *New Years Evil* or *Alien Contamination* or *Fighting Back*. Maybe it's just nostalgia but I want these types of old and rare movies on local channels again (hell, I want local channels again but I talk enough about that in my weekly column **Sanity Is Razor Thin** at **geekjuicemedia.com**).

Let's also bring up our friends The Horror Host. They are attempting to bring back this kind of TV and they deserve our total support, if you have a local Horror Host, watch their show, they are the very people that might fix this problem on local stations across the country.

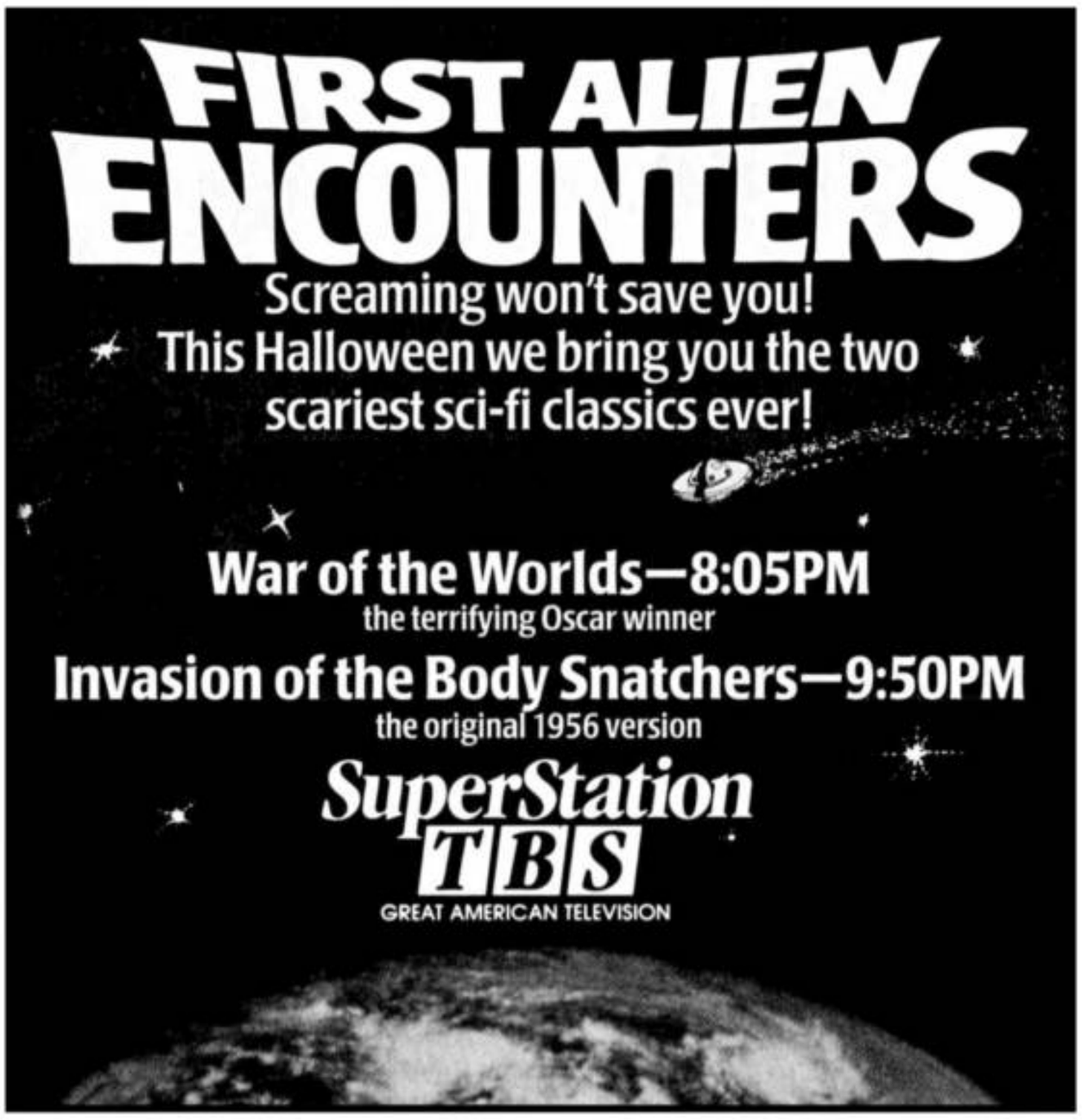
Now, I can't leave out basic cable (lets deal with HBO and pay channels another time), but TNT, TBS, A&E

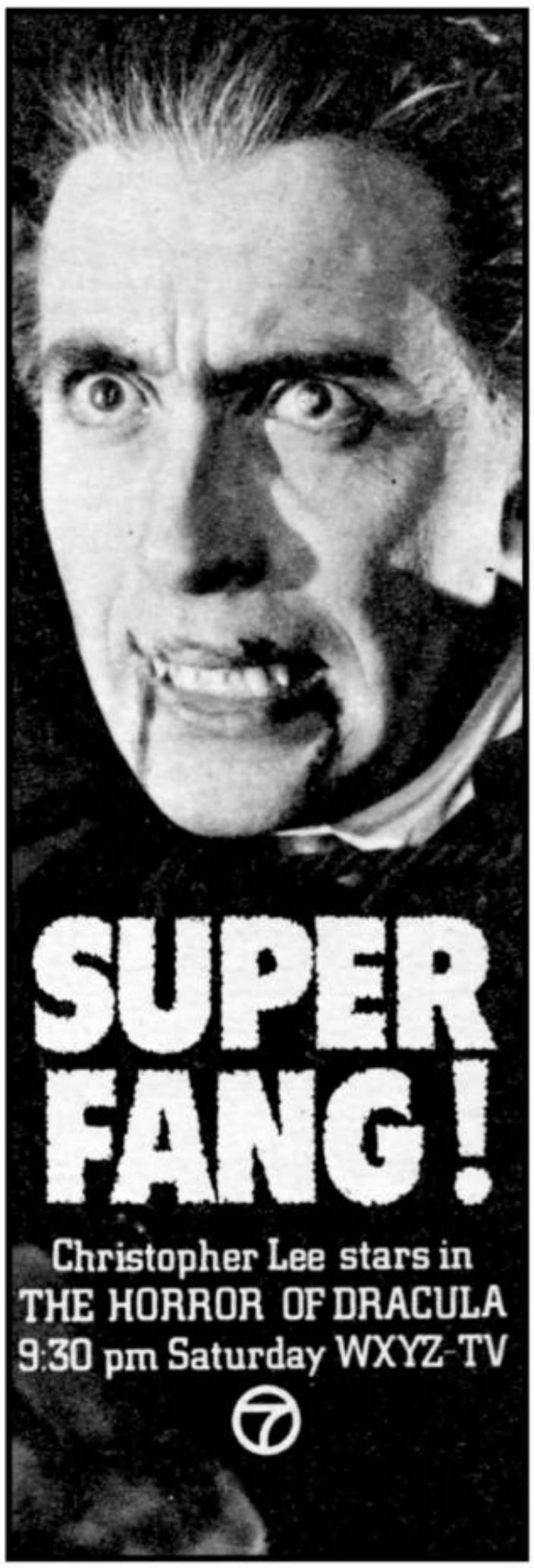
and any number of basic cable channels used to show movies ALL THE TIME as well. TBS used to have great crime thrillers in the afternoons, A&E used to show great "artsy" sci-fi movies late at night, TNT used to have a slew of movies they would show (not counting Monstervision) and now all of that are RERUNS of TV shows... ENDLESSLY. I saw *Mazes & Monsters* on TBS, I saw *THX-1138* on A&E, I saw *Atom Age Vampire* on TNT (just to give a small example and I could list so many more like *Phantom of the Paradise, Screamers, Warriors of the Wasteland, The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave* and *Eaten Alive*).

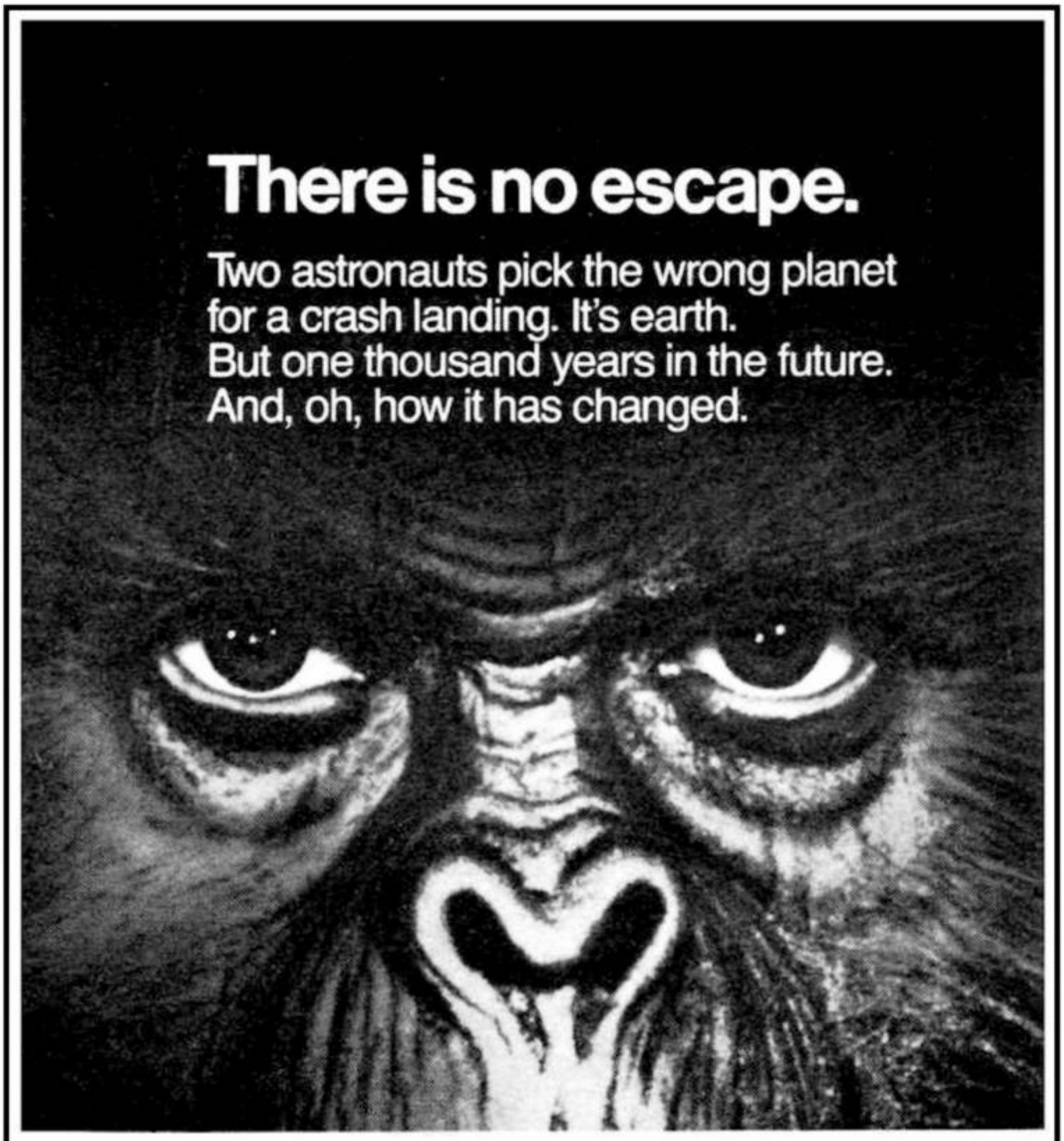
I saw so many great films late at night on some local station that I can't even name them all, plus a good portion of these films are, to this day, not available on DVD and in some cases never even received a VHS release.

Let's remember a form of movie viewing that is gone and likely never to return and let's also curse the infomercial for its almost ruthless intent to exterminate TV as we know it.

Josh Hadley can be contacted at 1201beyond@gmail.com and be sure to visit his webpage at www.1201beyond.com




SUPER FANG!
Christopher Lee stars in
THE HORROR OF DRACULA
9:30 pm Saturday WXYZ-TV
7


There is no escape.
Two astronauts pick the wrong planet
for a crash landing. It's earth.
But one thousand years in the future.
And, oh, how it has changed.
THE NEW PLANET OF
THE APES
Roddy McDowall as Galen hosts all this week.
abc THE 4:00 MOVIE 7

WE GOT WHO YOU WANTED!!!
KING KONG and MIGHTY JOE YOUNG
DYNAMITE!!!
Friday, May 18 TV2

HALLOWEEN II
"I fired six shots into him. He just got up and walked away..."
TONIGHT 9:00 PM
TOLEDO 36 WUPW
HALLOWEEN III
"The world is going to change tonight. I'm glad you'll be able to watch it..."
TONIGHT 9:00 PM
TOLEDO 36 WUPW
FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 3
"I'll never forget that horrible face. Never..."
TONIGHT 9:00 PM
TOLEDO 36 WUPW

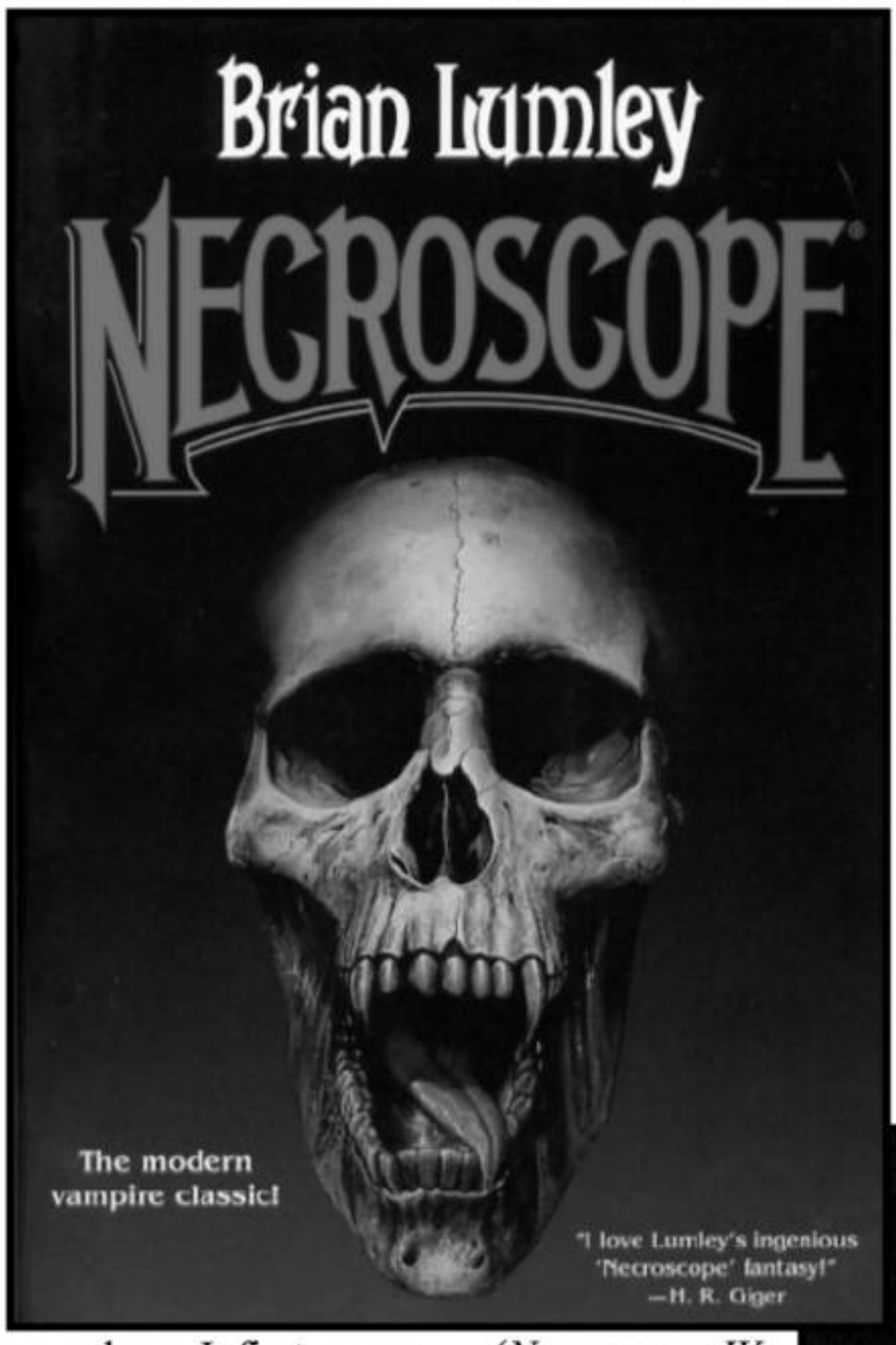
CHRISTOPHER LEE
PETER CUSHING
The Gorgon
11:30 Friday TV2 WJBK-TV

Remembering Brian Lumley's NECROSCOPE Series

By Scott Shoyer

I've been wanting to write an overview of the amazing series written by Brian Lumley titled *Necroscope* – if you haven't read these books (or worse, haven't even *heard* of them) then hopefully you'll rush out and read them. Trust me, these books are every horror fan's dream.

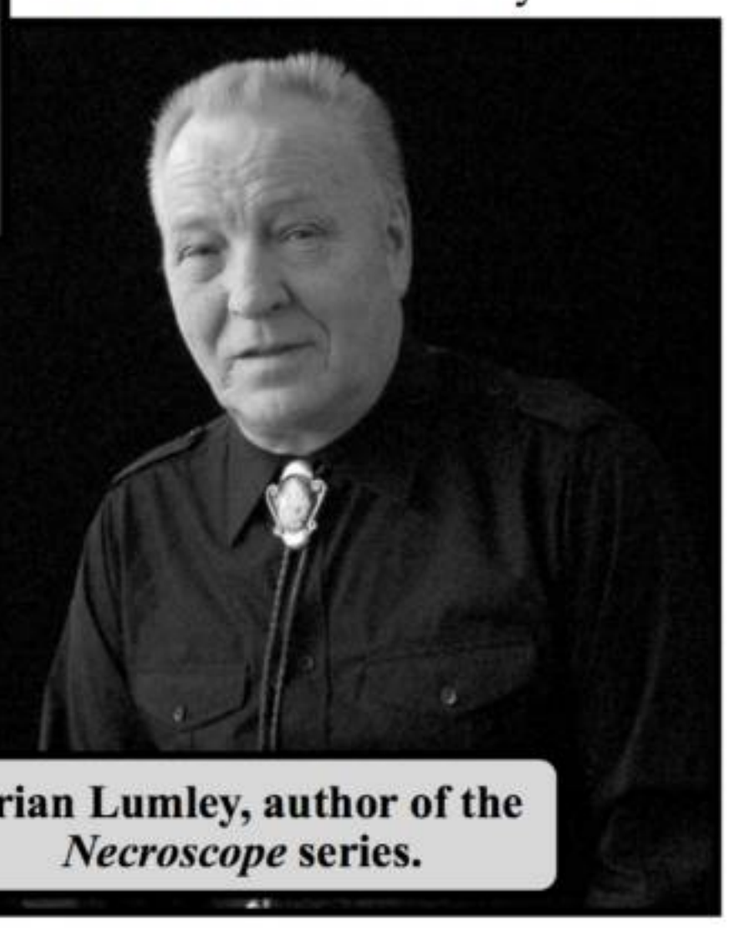
1986 was a damn good year for horror: We got an amazing remake of *The Fly* by none other than David Cronenberg, *From Beyond* by Stuart Gordon, *Night of the Creeps* by Fred Dekker, and *Demons 2* by Lamberto Bava. We also got such guilty pleasures as Jim Wynorski's *Chopping Mall*, Steve Miner's *House*, and George Pavlou's film version of Clive Barker's short story, *Rawhead Rex*. In the world of horror literature Stephen King gave us *It*; Dean Koontz wrote *Strangers*; and Joe R. Lansdale published *Dead in the West*. But what many people overlook is that in 1986 Brian Lumley wrote the first of the *Necroscope* books, detailing the adventures of Harry Keogh and how he became *the* Necroscope with the ability to talk to the dead and transport himself anywhere in the world (and the universe) in the blink of an eye using the Möbius Continuum. This 512 page novel is rich with character development, history, and violence. I remember the exact bookstore where I first came across it; a now long-out-of-business little ma & pa bookstore…you know, the kind that use to exist before such superstores like Borders and Barnes & Noble's swallowed them up. It was a summer day and I was just looking around for something scary and unique, and when I saw the cover, a huge skull with a pointy tongue and sharp teeth, I was immediately drawn to it. To be honest, I didn't even read what it was about. In my gut I knew this was going to be a great book.



As I started reading *Necroscope* I immediately got sucked into the well-developed character of the protagonist, Harry Keogh, and how he came into his tremendous powers. Yes, there were times the book seemed to drag on. Lumley gets a little too detailed sometimes when giving a character's back story. But in the end these (at times overly) detailed characterizations only helped to elevate this novel above the typical fodder we're used to getting in the genre. You actually end up caring deeply for the "heroes" and you really despise the "bad guys." I just knew I was reading something special.

A little less than half way into the novel it hit me. It was 1990 and I was substitute teaching to make some money for spring break. I was monitoring an exam that morning when I realized that *Necroscope* is a vampire novel (yeah, go ahead and laugh). Not just any kind of vampire novel but one that's unique, original, violent, and actually scary!! I'm glad I didn't read the back cover of it in the book store because I would've never bought a vampire book; I've been burned by too many authors cranking out shitty vampire novels, trying to make a quick buck. But *Necroscope* was different.

Even before finishing it I raced back to the bookstore and found that there were three more books in the series already written (*Necroscope IV: Deadspeak* was released in 1990). I bought them all and then finished reading the first *Necroscope*. For the next 19 years Harry Keogh and the Wamphyri were a huge part of my horror



Brian Lumley, author of the *Necroscope* series.

appetite. For you horror fans who aren't familiar with this amazing series of books, keep reading. Every fan of horror needs to read these books. They're *that* good.

Full disclosure here: The last *Necroscope* novel I read was 2006's *Necroscope: The Touch*. I haven't read the first *Necroscope* since 1990. This article isn't meant to be a book-by-book review. This is an overview of Lumley's amazing *Necroscope* series. In total Lumley wrote 15 books in the series. Here's the breakdown:

<u>The original *Necroscope* series</u>:
Necroscope (1986)
Necroscope II: Wamphyri! (1988)
Necroscope III: The Source (1989)
Necroscope IV: Deadspeak (1990)
Necroscope V: Deadspawn (1991)

<u>The Vampire World Trilogy</u>:
Blood Brothers (1992)
The Last Aerie (1993)
Bloodwars (1994)

<u>The Lost Years Series</u>:
Necroscope: The Lost Years (1995)
Necroscope: Resurgence, The Lost Years Volume 2 (1996)

<u>The E-Branch Trilogy</u>:
E-Branch 1: Invaders (1998)
E-Branch 2: Defilers (1999)
E-Branch 3: Avengers (2000)

<u>Lumley's Attempt to Revive the *Necroscope* Books</u>:
Necroscope: The Touch (2006)
Necroscope: Harry and the Pirates (2009)

The one negative thing is that none of these books or series stands on its own. In order to fully understand what the Vampire World trilogy or The Lost Years is about, you need to have read all the books before it. That's bad news if you just wanna jump around and read the books as you find them. But it's great news if you're looking for a mind-shattering series of horror books that will keep you completely engrossed until the last page of the last book. The only book I haven't read yet is *Harry and the Pirates*. It's on my list but I haven't gotten around to it. And to be honest, I'm kind of hesitant to read it (more on this later).

The last book in the series, *The Touch*, was actually very disappointing. At 512 pages it dragged on in more than a few spots. You could feel Lumley was trying to revive the *Necroscope* series with *The Touch* by injecting some new blood (ahhem) into the franchise, but it just didn't work (the vampires here were replaced by evil aliens. Bad choice). A few familiar characters show up in *The Touch*, but by now the magic and originality of the *Necroscope* series was too late to revive. It was like watching the three newest *Star Wars* movies: You wanted them to be awesome and kick ass, but no matter how hard you tried to convince yourself they were good, deep down inside you knew they sucked. *The Touch* left me feeling the same way, and the effect was devastating. It was like meeting up with your best friend from high school only to discover that you two have nothing in common anymore. By the time Lumley got around to *The Touch*, the magic was gone; it was the end of a franchise. But on the bright side there were still ten amazing, unable-to-put-down books to read and three more that were pretty good (the E-Branch series).

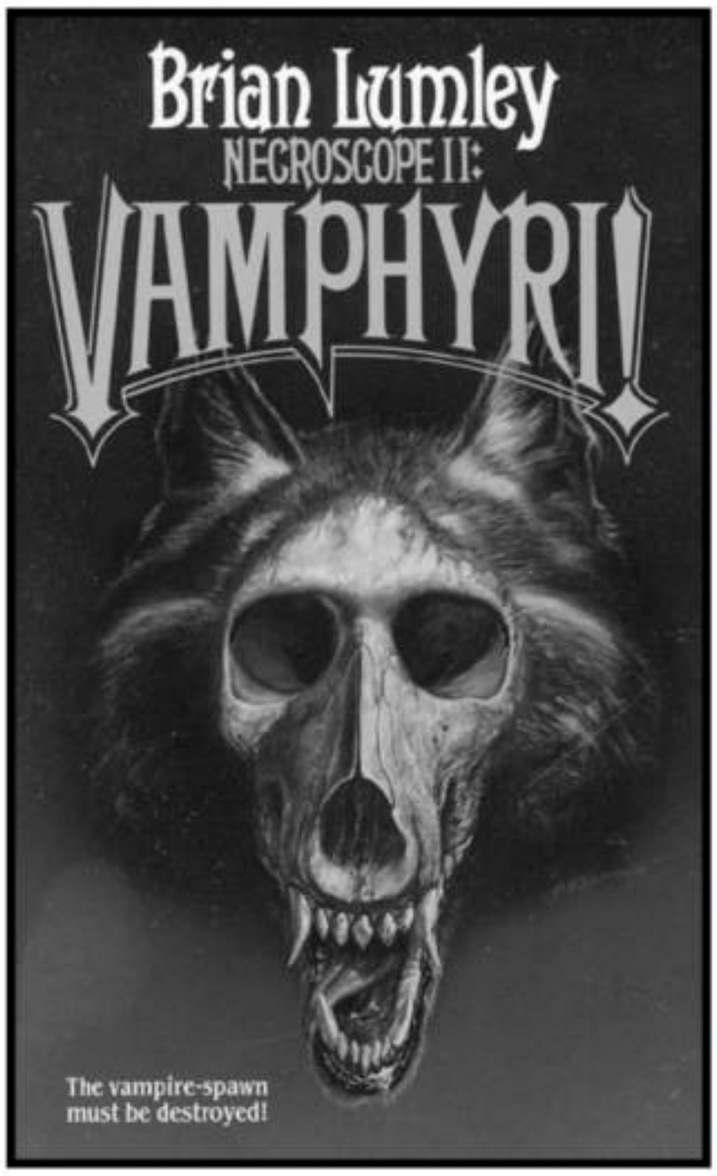
Here's the basic story of the entire series in a nutshell (and for those of you who are going to read these books, there are a few spoilers ahead): Harry Keogh is the world's only necroscope; he can talk to dead people, using what is called "deadspeak." Harry forms strong bonds with the dead, and the dead love Harry because he is a "light in the eternal darkness." With this bond Harry realizes he can learn from the dead. In the first novel Harry learns to fight like an expert from a dead army sergeant he lets inhabit his body. We also learn that whatever someone did or wanted to do in life they continue after death. For example, an inventor continues to invent new things while a poet continues to compose new poetry after they die.

In a very important part of both the series and in Harry's development, he hooks up with the dead German mathematician August Möbius. Möbius has been continuing his theoretical math formulas after death and teaches Harry about the Möbius Continuum. This allows Harry to transport himself anywhere in the universe by simply "thinking" about complex math formulas; the formulas create a "door" whereby you enter the Möbius Continuum and can instantly appear anywhere (there is no passage of time in the continuum). This becomes valuable because Harry also learns from his legions of dead friends that there also exist vampires in the world; violent, savage, blood thirsty vampires that want to conquer the earth and

enslave humanity to use as food.

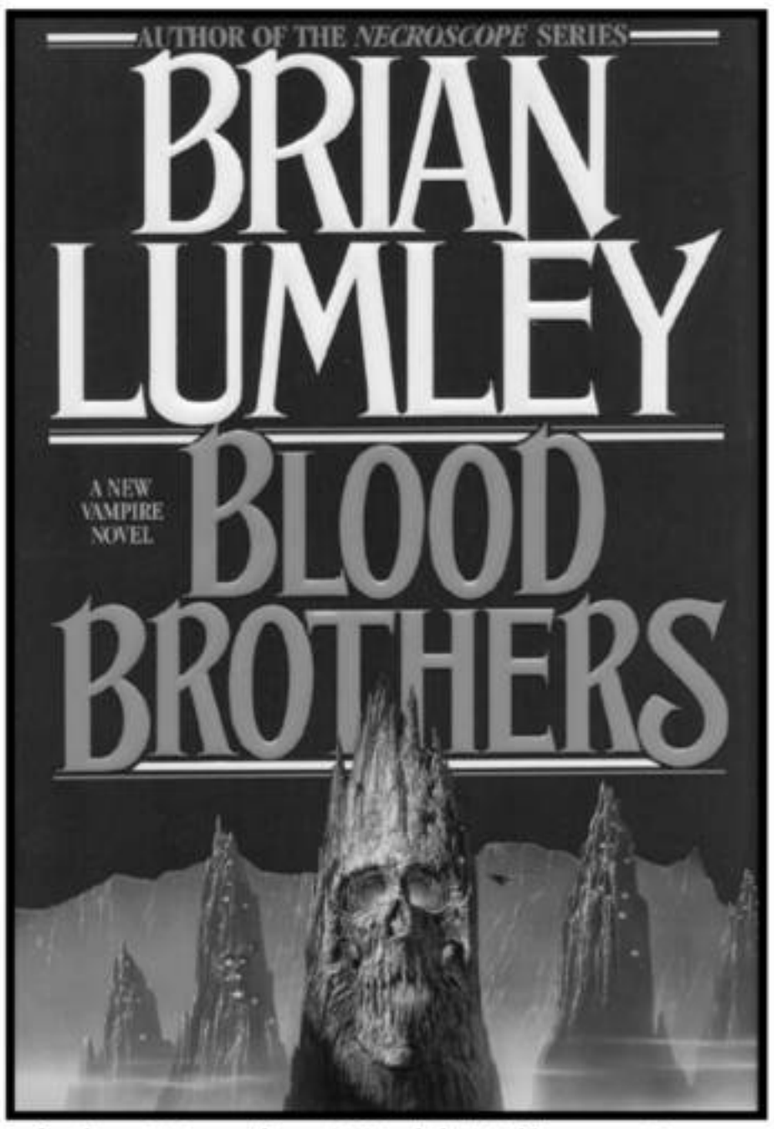
Because of Harry's tremendous powers he is recruited by E-Branch, a super-secret British organization that is made up of people with special powers. There are telepaths, empaths, people with telekinesis, and even a woman who is so in-tune with Mother Earth that she knows when the earth is being damaged (she becomes physically sickened when a company is dumping toxic waste in the oceans).

Harry is the most powerful of the E-Branch members and he leads the group in uncovering and hunting down vampires. But these are not your typical Euro-trash, Anne Rice/Stephenie Meyer vampires. Lumley takes the traditional vampire myth and turns it inside out. It's the most original vampire myth I've read. Lumley creates an entire mythos here. Think the vampires from the movie *Near Dark* crossed with H.P. Lovecraft's Elders (Lumley, in fact, was greatly influenced by Lovecraft. Lumley's first few works were set in Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos milieu and even echoed Lovecraft's literary style). His vampires are so original, in fact, that he creates a new name for them: Wamphyri.



Lumley's Wamphyri come from a parallel universe known as Starside/Sunside. An experiment with a high-powered photon beam in the Ural Mountains opened a "door" connecting these two worlds. The Wamphyri now know about our world and they want to conquer it. But what exactly are Lumley's Wamphyri? In a dark and deadly swamp on Starside there are leeches that infect people and begin the transformation/ascension to Wamphyri. One doesn't become Wamphyri immediately. The leech at first gives the host a lot of "powers". They become inhumanly strong, develop psychic abilities, develop quick healing abilities, and also develop a blood lust which the leech needs to survive. But as the leech grows bigger the host loses more and more of their humanity until ultimately the leech takes over completely. The ascension to Wamphyri Lord is described by Lumley in detail and is just absolutely horrendous. The Wamphyri don't just suck blood and kill; they torture, rape, humiliate, and eat the flesh of human beings. They are also very territorial creatures that will annihilate anyone or anything that stands in their way. They are truly the most horrifying creatures in modern horror literature.

Keogh fathers a son who inherits his powers. Harry Jr. in fact becomes even stronger than his father and has better



mastery over the Möbius Continuum. During an attack by a Wamphyri Lord, Harry Jr. transports himself and his mom to Starside/Sunside where they live out the rest of their lives. Harry Jr. ends up having twin sons with a Szgany girl (the name of the race of gypsy's on Starside/Sunside), and his two sons, Nathan and Nestor, become the focus of the Vampire World Trilogy. As good as the original *Necroscope* series is, the Vampire World Trilogy will blow your mind! Even Lumley considers that trilogy his "finest, most ambitious and important work." In that trilogy we follow twins Nathan and Nestor and see how one develops his father's amazing necroscope powers while the other takes the path of the Wamphyri. This trilogy is rich with Wamphyri history and will have you skipping work just to read more.

Trying to summarize this very intricate, detailed series of books is like trying to write a cheat sheet for quantum physics on an index card. Lumley gives us detailed histories of many various Wamphyri bloodlines and over the course of the series gets extremely detailed about exactly what these Wamphyri are and how they develop. It's an incredible series of books that you need to read. Lumley's writing style is quick-paced (except in the few places where he gets bogged down with a little too much history) and very descriptive. His descriptions of various battles with the Wamphyri are so violent you'll be sitting there with your mouth hanging open wondering, "Did I just read that correctly?" Lumley also does an amazing job with his descriptions of the Wamphyri; your mind is going to create some of the most nightmarish visions of what these creatures look like based on his descriptions. They are terrifying.

Writing this article has really given me a taste to re-experience this series. I think 2012 will be the year I take a trip down memory lane and start over again with the first book in the *Necroscope* series. You should do the same, and trust me, you won't be disappointed. Among other things, this series will do for you what it did for me…prove that vampires really *are* ferocious, scary creatures that are capable of terrifying the shit out of you!

You can check out more about Brian Lumley, his *Necroscope* series, and all his writings at brianlumley.com.

Scott Shoyer currently operates his own horror-themed website, http://www.AnythingHorror.com

SHADOWMAIL

LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS

NO FLUFF HERE!

I got the magazine in today's mail. It's very well done. I liked the stories, the first one ripping Bob Kane was kinda funny (but he does deserve it). The design of the magazine is great. It reminds me of the older '70s monster-fan magazines (I mean that as a compliment, ha!). The paper quality, especially inside, is very good. I know this is a weird thing to say but I like the fact that there is a TON of fun in-depth stuff to read, seems like a better value. Most mags today are complete fluff you can read in three minutes.

Keep up the good work!

Thanks,
Tommy Brookshire

MONDO RONDO

Congratulations on the Rondo nominations! Being a subscriber since your second issue, I can testify that the nominations were much deserved. Your last issue was a joy to read and, in my humble opinion, Frank Warden's "All Shall Listen When The Bat Whispers" is Rondo-worthy for best article of 2012 (so far, at least)! I was flabbergasted by Mr. Warden's knowledge on Roland West's 1930 film. I've owned *The Bat Whispers* on laserdisc for years and I really enjoy giving it the occasional viewing, but I never knew about all the intricacies that went into its production. Lately I've been jaded when it comes to genre magazines, but articles like Mr. Warden's is what keeps me subscribed to your great publication! I wish you all the best and await the next issue in the mail.

A dedicated reader,
Charley Schell

SHARE THE SCARES

LOVED the all-bat issue! I'm typically not a fan of themed issues but somehow *Shadowland #3* still had more than enough variety to keep me entertained. I'm writing for two reasons, first – I wanted to give credit where it's due. It's rare to read an article that goes against the "genius" that is Bob Kane. Kimball's piece on the origins of Batman was very informative and it's nice for a publication to finally acknowledge the many "ghost writers" and artists that never received a fair shake during Batman's Golden Age. It was a long time coming. I don't ever recall such a bold stance ever taken by Starlog's *Comics Scene* magazine.

Second – I just had to comment, and maybe add a little something, to the *Bat Whispers* article. The retrospective was phenomenal and, having seen the movie many years ago, will make me seek it out again for another viewing. With that, I NEEDED to share this with your readers! I've sent along an image of *The Bat* comic book, published in August 1992 by Adventure Comics. It's printed in black-and-white and has some pretty cool artwork. The interior front cover clearly states Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Bat*, so it's not just a passing resemblance to the character. I picked this neat little gem up in the mid 1990s and I literally forgot all about it until reading the *Bat Whispers* article in your last issue. I scoured my collection and, behold, there it was. Enjoy!

Best,
Alex Morgan

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or snail mail to:
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HORROR IN THE UK!

FRIGHTEN BRIGHTON

Shadowland Magazine speaks with Richard Gladman about his monstrous movement to keep classic horror films alive in England!

SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE: Can you tell us a little about the Classic Horror Campaign and Frighten Brighton? How did the idea for both originally come about?

RICHARD GLADMAN: I started the Classic Horror Campaign after prowling thru the television schedules one evening and realising that none of the hundreds of UK TV channels ever show any old horror films – virtually nothing from before the mid-'90s! There was literally nothing I wanted to watch and it made me realise that we were throwing away a huge part of our cultural heritage by ignoring these classic old movies and not allowing them to be introduced to new generations. So I started an online petition at first and then a blog to promote the petition and it snowballed from there. We now have a website, a thriving Facebook page, regular monthly film screenings and support from horror celebrities across the world including a nomination for Best Fan Event from the prestigious Rondo Classic Horror Awards.
Frighten Brighton came about because I had long felt that the city of Brighton was sadly lacking its very own horror film festival and so this was our way of testing the waters with various horror-themed events under the Frighten Brighton banner.

SM: What films have played at Frighten Brighton so far?

RG: In Brighton we've screened *House on Haunted Hill* (1959), *Asylum* (1972), *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* (1974), *The Entity* (1981), *Night of the Living Dead* (1991), *The Gore Gore Girls* (1972) and *Re-Animator* (1985)…quite a fun and eclectic mix!

SM: What films have you shown at your Classic Horror Campaign double bills?

RG: Some of the highlights of our Classic Horror Campaign screenings around the UK include *Night of the Demon* (1957), *Vampire Circus* (1972), *Cat People* (1942), *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), *Black Sunday* (1960) and *Frogs* (1971)…all films from before 1980, a mixture of real classics and some more obscure treats!

SM: There's more than movie screenings at Frighten Brighton too – it's really more like a horror festival! What other events, such as the Macabre Market, can horror fans expect to find?

RG: Our last two Frighten Brighton events consisted of a mixture of film screenings, book signings, ghost story readings and a variety of different spooky market stalls selling everything from original artwork to pulp paperbacks, horror magazines, creepy cakes and lots more. In fact we took over three whole floors of the Rock Inn pub in the South Coast city of Brighton.

SM: Any plans for future Frighten Brighton events?

RG: The next Frighten Brighton event promises to be bigger and better than ever before as we are planning an all-day classic horror film festival in the heart of the city. The details are under wraps at the moment but it will be taking place in August and will

be the perfect antidote for those not interested in or unable to attend London's Olympic Games.

SM: As for the Classic Horror Campaign, what do you have lined up for the rest of the year?

RG: We have our regular horror double bill screenings every month at the Roxy Bar & Screen in London. As well as the movies we have the Cyberschizoid horror quiz with prizes and free giveaways and are hoping to get some special guests to introduce some of the films and sign autographs over the course of the year. Some of the films already lined up include *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* (1958) and *The Green Slime* (1968) in a special sci-fi monster themed horror double bill. In May we have a British Vampire Special in conjunction with Bedabbled! Magazine and later on this year we will once again be taking part in the Scala Forever film festival (this year known as Scala Beyond) which celebrates the old Scala cinema which used to run grindhouse and exploitation movie screenings in London's Kings Cross in the '70s and '80s. It was an amazing place which helped shape my own filmic tastes!

SM: Are there any films that you would particularly love to screen?

RG: There are so many classic horror, sci-fi and cult movies that deserve to be shown on the big screen that I'm spoilt for choice to be honest. However, a few particular favorites of mine include Caroline Munro's trashy sci-fi epic *Starcrash* (1980), *The Incredible Melting Man* (1977) and any of the '70s Godzilla giant monster mash-ups from Japan!

SM: Finally, how can people get involved in the Classic Horror Campaign?

RG: First of all please sign our online petition...every signature counts! Secondly, subscribe to our free monthly newsletter. Thirdly, check out our website and Facebook page...everything is so interractive and we invite contributions and feedback from our supporters and followers! Lastly, if you are in London or can get to London at any stage make sure you drop in to our classic horror double bill screenings...they're awesome!!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON
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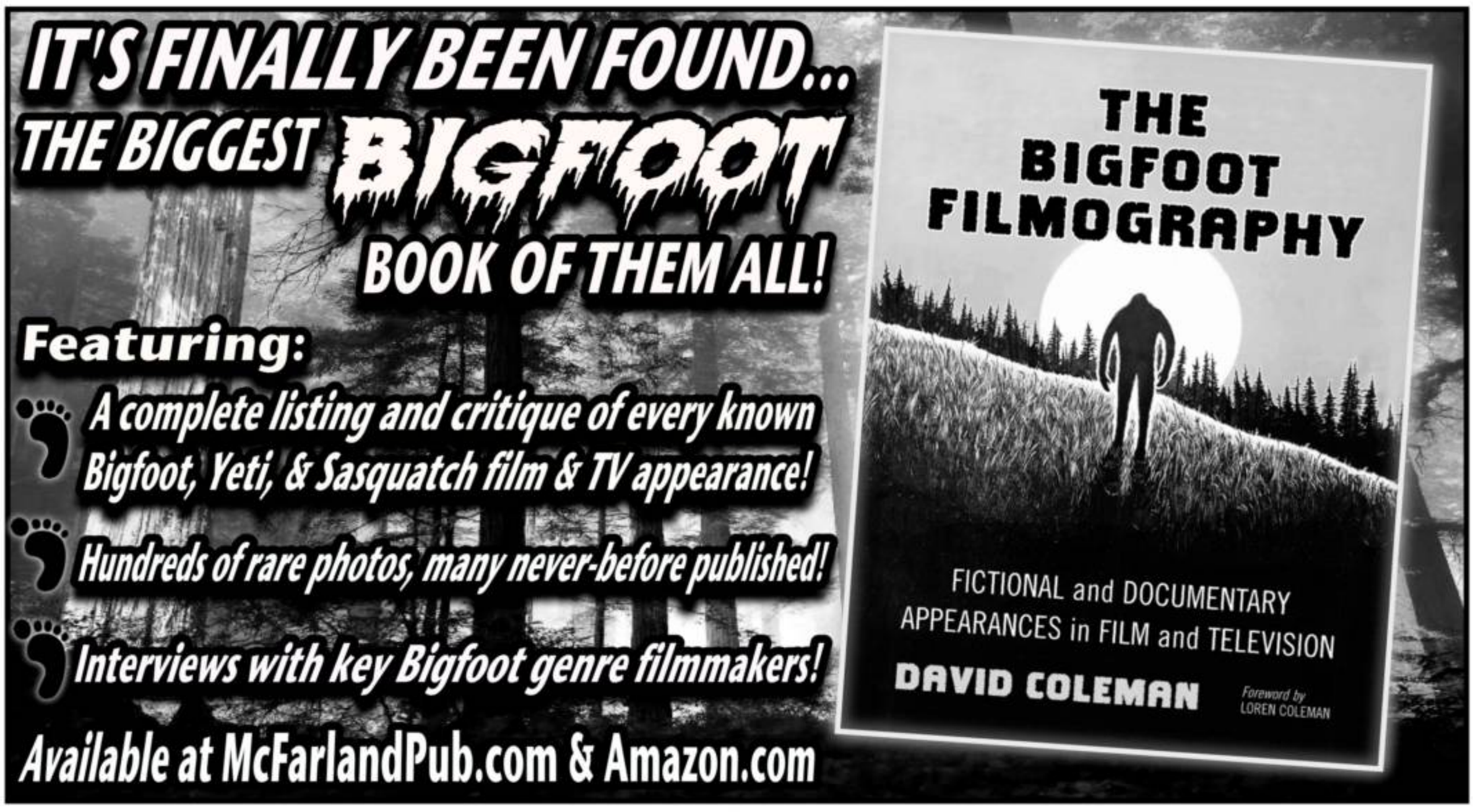

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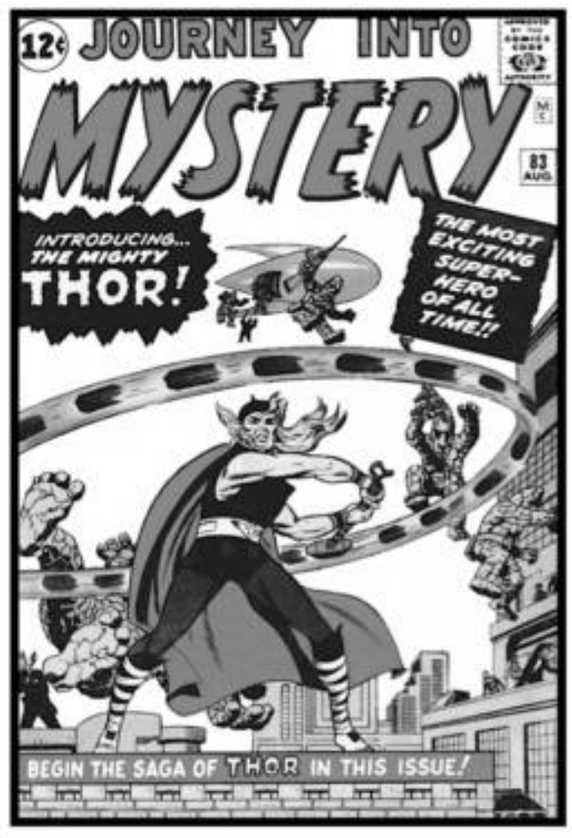
FIRST APPEARANCES OF EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

THE AVENGERS

THE AVENGERS
The Avengers #1
(Sept. 1963)

CAPTAIN AMERICA
Captain America Comics #1
(March 1941)

IRON MAN
Tales of Suspense #39
(March 1963)



THOR
Journey Into Mystery #83
(Aug. 1962)

HULK
The Incredible Hulk #1
(May 1962)

NICK FURY
Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #1 (May 1963)

BLACK WIDOW
Tales of Suspense #52
(April 1964)

HAWKEYE
Tales of Suspense #57
(Sept. 1964)

The Avengers' **big-screen adventure has ignited the box office and, while *The Avengers 2* is inevitable, more of Marvel's finest are already headed to a theater near you! Up first will be *Iron Man 3*, currently set for a May 3rd 2013 release. *Thor 2*, deviating from the typical spring/summer blockbuster formula, will be out November 15th 2013. And *Captain America 2* is being readied for an April 4th, 2014 release.**

THE HUNGER GAMES AND THE BLOODY LEGACY OF BATTLE ROYALE

By Arya Ponto

We had a show of hands first.

"Who hasn't seen this film?" asked Subway Cinema's Daniel Craft to the 250 or so people seated in the sold out screening. Two-thirds of the audience raised their hands. I was flabbergasted. From the *Battle Royale* t-shirts and caps that were present, I was expecting this to be a fan screening. There was a rumbling of amusement among us fans when the hands went up. "Oooh. Wow. This is going to be be fun," said Daniel. He was right.

This was at last July's New York Asian Film Festival, where Subway Cinema and Japan Society collaborated on a retrospective screening of the Japanese cult classic. In hindsight, the number of first timers was understandable. It was only earlier this year that we saw *Battle Royale* officially released on DVD and Blu-ray in the United States for the first time. It was long overdue for such a modern masterpiece.

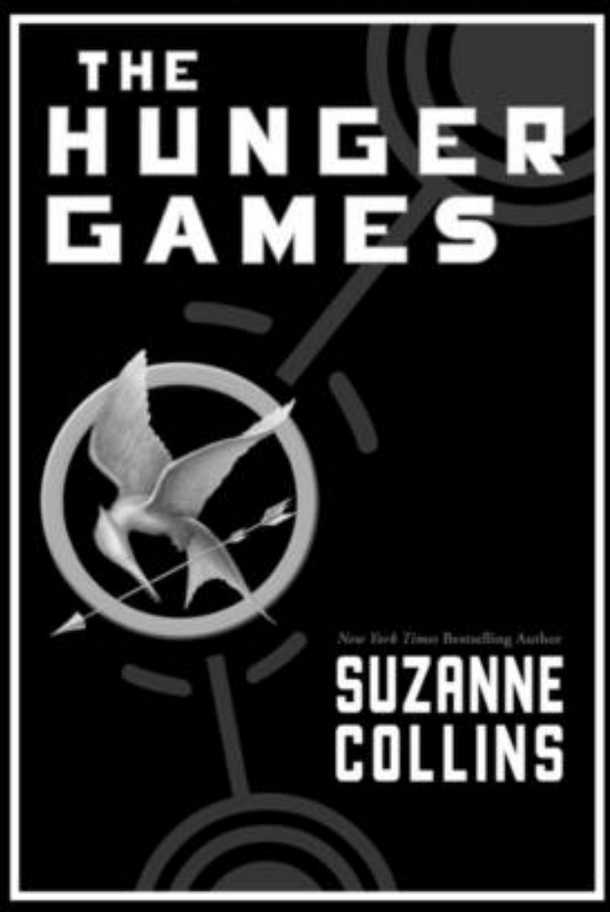
* * *

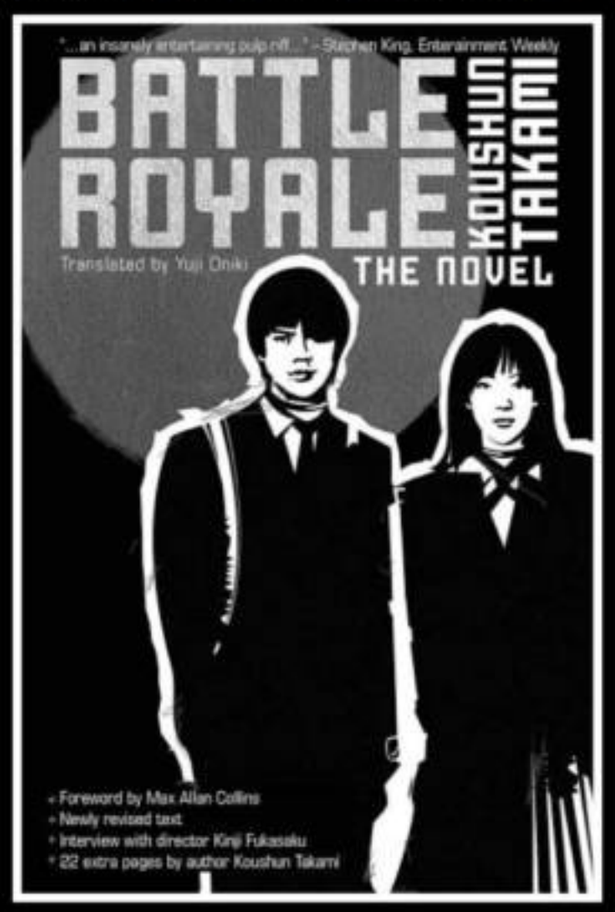
The release was timed to the opening of *The Hunger Games* movie, which hit theaters the same week. This is no coincidence; the two films, after all, share the same premise, at least superficially. Ever since the release of Suzanne Collins' massively popular novel about a group of teenagers who are forced to brutally murder one another in a last-man-standing deathmatch, the *Battle Royale* comparison has not let up.

Hunger Games fans are quick to point out the differences, of which there are admittedly many. For one thing, *Hunger Games* is futuristic, and has a bleaker dystopian tone than *Battle Royale*'s contemporary satire. That is, if we're comparing only the movies.

Though it is more popularly known as a 2000 Kinji Fukasaku movie, *Battle Royale* was originally a 1999 science-fiction thriller novel by Koushun Takami, first published in English in 2003 after the movie was already an underground sensation in the US. It bears more similarities to *Hunger Games* than the movie adaptation, which is stripped of the novel's leftist, anti-patriotic, pro-Bruce Springsteen sentiments. In the movie, the Battle Royale Program was started at the dawn of the new millennium as a response to an increase in delinquent youths. In the original novel, it is a 50-year old program that was started after Japan won World War II and became a new country called The Republic of Greater East Asia, which is ruled by a totalitarian government. After crushing homegrown insurgents, the Republic started these annual killing games where they select teenagers to ship to booby-trapped outdoor arenas equipped only with bags filled with random tools and weapons, as a reminder to the general population to never rebel against the government. The novel follows one of these games, featuring main characters who not only try to survive the program, but also fight back against the regime.

Sound familiar? In *The Hunger Games*, we follow an almost identical bloodsport decades after it was started in the aftermath of a great war, in a new country called Panem ruled by a totalitarian government that was born out of the ashes of North America. Collins maintains that she'd never even heard of *Battle Royale* until after she turned in





her manuscript, at which point somebody inevitably mentioned the similarities to her. Though it's conceivable that Collins did not intend to rip off Takami, her work is still undeniably derivative of his, and as I was reading *The Hunger Games*, the coincidence seemed astonishing.

To Collins' credit, her novel does have two strong elements going for it that *Battle Royale* never attempted. One is the first-person narrative that follows Katniss Everdeen's emotional rollercoaster during the Hunger Games. *Battle Royale* has an inventive, thrilling countdown nature to its "40 kids enter, only 1 will leave" chain of events, but it never delves too deeply into the characters' larger worldview; more about the uncertainties and fears in social adolescence than the way Katniss has to always examine and second-guess what each of her actions in the arena would mean to her family, her home, her country and her enemies. The other compelling thing is the first half of the book that details the lead-up to the Hunger Games, where the usually modest and grimy Katniss is given a complete makeover to turn her into a television star.

* * *

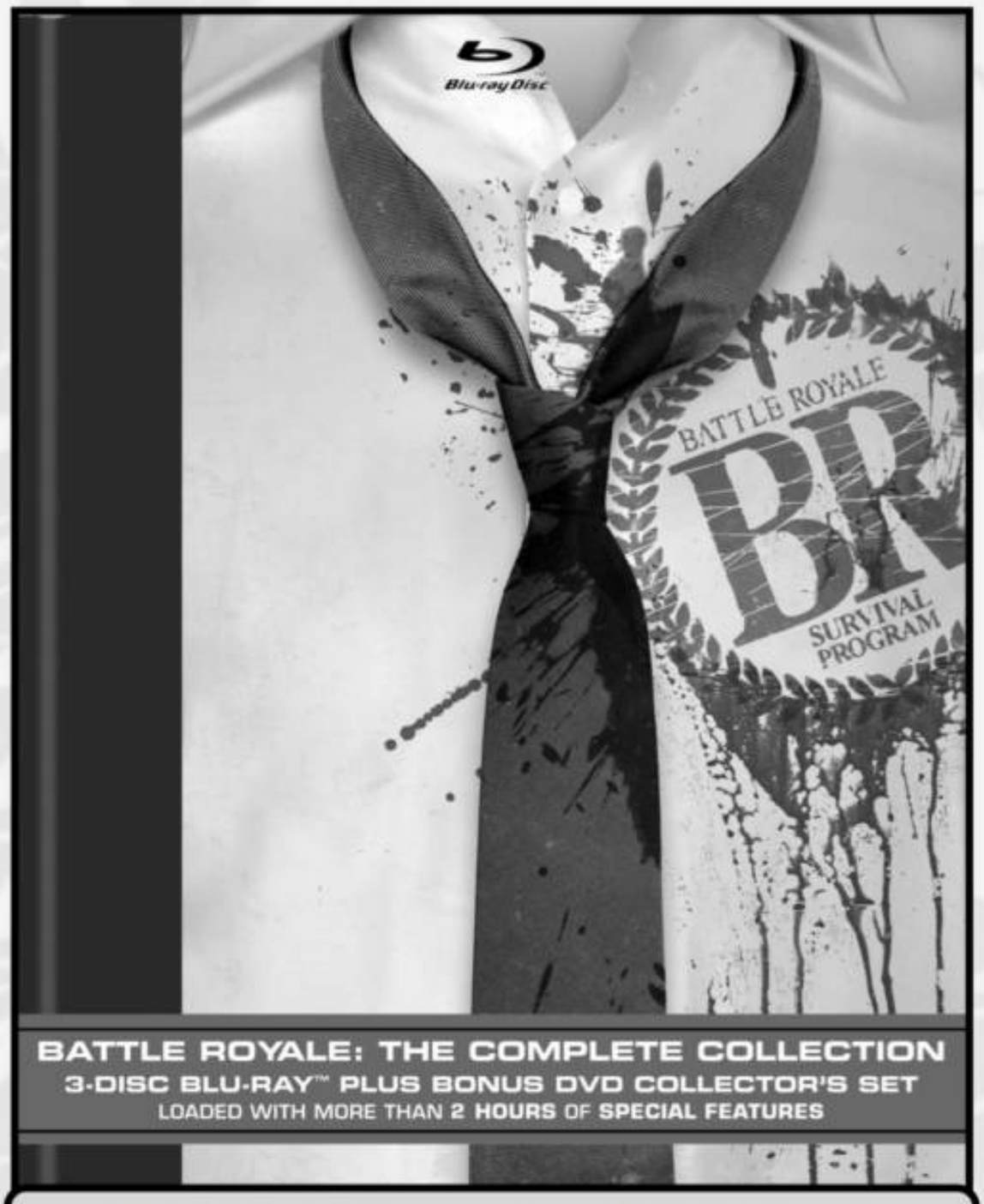
For the benefit of those at the New York Asian Film Festival who raised their hands, Daniel offered an introduction to *Battle Royale* prior to the screening. "This is the one that got away," he said with a measure of regret. Truer words have never been spoken.

Twelve years ago, when *Battle Royale* was released in Japan, it sparked a controversy not because of its graphic depiction of violence, but because the violence involves 15-year-old teenagers gunning each other down. The Japanese ratings board wanted to give the film an 18+ rating, but director Kinji Fukasaku, adamant that the message of the film should reach the teenagers that the story is about, argued for a 15+ and won. It was argued that the kid-on-kid violence is a byproduct of a far-fetched premise, therefore not being imitable in the real world—the same logic that is probably being used to excuse *The Hunger Games* movie.

Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*.

The commentary on the disparate lives between the upperclass and the proletariat, the extreme contrast of hunger versus gluttony, the detailed inner workings of a propaganda machine, Katniss' discomfort and innate guilt with being pampered, her uncertainty and rejection of Peeta's love for her... These are the components that grabbed me the most; so interesting are they that when the decapitations and exploding rib cages begin, my enthusiasm for the story actually wanes. It's for the same reason that the sequel *Catching Fire*, which puts less focus on the Games, and the conclusion *Mockingjay*, which doesn't feature it, are superior novels. They break away from the original pitch that made the concept a *Battle Royale* clone, and rely on its biggest strength, which is putting Katniss through the emotional wringer of being a reluctant savior.

But while that made the film provocative in Japan, it was downright unmarketable in the US. It was the early 2000s, and the specter of the Columbine shootings was still hovering close to the ground. Until the recent Anchor Bay DVD/Blu-ray release, *Battle Royale* never received any kind of distribution in the US, thus making it a bonafide cult phenomenon through bootlegs and region-free imports (such was the DVD copy that Netflix carried for years). For a while, many incorrectly believed it was banned in the US, but really the issue had more to do with production company Toei expecting a big distribution payout because of the film's international notoriety, which the American video companies that wanted to brave the potential post-Columbine backlash could not possibly afford.



Anchor Bay's Blu-ray release of *Battle Royale*.

Had things not turn out the way it did, who knows? *Battle Royale* could have enjoyed a healthy run in the early aughts US market that was widely embracing Asian movie releases like *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Hero* and *Oldboy*. Instead of Americans slowly seeking it out through cult channels, maybe it would have been one of those films controversially talked about—at least just enough that Suzanne Collins would have heard of it.

If so, would we still have *The Hunger Games* as we know it today?

* * *

Maybe it's just as well that *Battle Royale*'s appeal is limited to those who seek it out. Talk of an American remake has been buzzing at low volume for a decade now, never serious enough to actually get off the ground. It seems moot now that we have *The Hunger Games*.

One problem with the remake suggestion is that the true tragedy of the premise would seem a bit foreign to replicate with American teenagers. The various people I introduced the film to in college could attest to that. Part of it is cultural: homeroom unity and academic competitiveness are not as common in US grade schools as it is in Japan. I went through the Asian school system in middle school, where I took all my classes with the same people, mostly in the same room all day, five days out of a week for three straight years. In *The Hunger Games*, the kids who participate in the killing are mostly strangers, and the case against murder is made only by the general "thou shalt not kill" morality. In *Battle Royale*, there's the added weight of having to kill close acquaintances you grew up together with and gotten to know a lot about, to say nothing of the friendships (or rivalries) formed.

School's out when classmates have to kill each other to survive.

Variations of this theme are repeated throughout the movie, showing the different ways teenagers betray their own convictions. At their age, the film theorizes, they operate only in extremes: they either conceal their feelings entirely, or go above and beyond in expressing them. A source of gallows humor and danger in the film is how these kids are constantly risking their lives for ridiculous puppy love crushes, by announcing them at inappropriate times or act too embarrassed to say them until it's way too

late—or not even then, like when one girl wants to tell her secret crush how much she likes him with her dying breath, but could only muster a "You're so cool."

It also applies the same flat-footedness to friendships, both in big set pieces (like the stellar lighthouse sequence where a group of best friends turn on each other over a misunderstanding) and in subtle moments (like the two BFFs who refuse to play the game at the beginning of the movie, but the next time we see them, they're lying dead next to each other with their backs literally stabbed). "Could you kill your best friend?" the film's tagline asks. Some, it seems, don't really know the answer to that question until it's answered for them.

One of the things that makes *Battle Royale* so special is how versatile it is in the kind of enjoyment one can get from it. As black comedy, there are some great giggle-inducing moments thanks to the absurdity of it all. It works as an action-thriller, too, with a how-exactly-are-they-gonna-get-outta-this-mess dread running rampant and characters who you think are going to last longer checking out without notice. Fukasaku was not exactly an action director, though. Previously best known for his intense yakuza flicks, Fukasaku's lensing of fights and shootouts emphasized more on consequences than actions, basking in the violence of the violent acts. The showdowns aren't epic and built-up, but quick and shocking. He's less interested in making a kill look exciting, more inclined to linger on a schoolgirl writhing in pain as her stomach is sponged by bullets.

That's why *Battle Royale*, as a straight action movie, is anticlimactic. It's a bunch of kids handling weapons for the first time, shooting worse than Imperial Stormtroopers. Kiriyama, the student who supposedly volunteered for the program, is presented to be evil incarnate and the kids' biggest threat, but he's still shown shooting people with a sub-machine gun from three feet away and missing. Because despite the silent, scary psychopath that he is, he's still only fifteen. All the awkward interactions, dumb priorities and incompetent brawls are how the film makes sure you don't get lost in the excitement and forget that these are kids that we're watching being slaughtered.

Fukasaku's movie is half cautionary tale and half satire, with an immediacy that he intended as a commentary on contemporary Japanese society. When

Fukasaku was the same age as these kids, he was living in constant terror during World War II, with no say in his government's war against the US of A. Once, he had to endure an American air raid by hiding under a pile of his dead classmates. Putting his own life experience into it, Fukasaku posited with *Battle Royale* that youths in Japan are always going to be unfairly jerked around by the insane whims of insecure adults, so the next generation better shape up, stop fucking around, and figure out how to better their future. He passed away at the age of 72 with *Battle Royale* as his last completed film, a golden example of social commentary left behind to ensure his legacy as one of cinema's greats.

* * *

It's funny—I'm aware that for a lot of film buffs, there tend to be a lot of hemming and hawing when asked what their favorite movie is; even just of the year, never mind of all time. Usually, it would be in a constant flux, and they'd have to name at least three or five to show off the diversity in their taste. For me, *Battle Royale* has always been a solid go-to answer.

The film perfectly represents that small area where art house films and weird genre flicks overlap. It looks raw in places and polished in others; sometimes respectful of death and sometimes gleefully over-the-top; both discerningly emotional and hilariously campy. It is a mish-mash of ideas and tonal shifts that make it feel alive and unpredictable, all packaged in a bold, uncompromising manner that seems thoughtfully calculated but doesn't really give a shit how offensive it comes across as. Its themes are political and heavy, yet so absurdly fun to watch over and over and over again.

A few years back, I randomly bumped into Quentin Tarantino in a biker bar in San Francisco and I told him that *Battle Royale* is my favorite movie of all time. He excitedly yelled over the noise of the bar that it's one of his, too—in the exact manner you'd expect him to—and gave me a big hug, just for liking the same movie. A die-hard Fukasaku fan himself, for the past twelve years, Tarantino has been one of the film's biggest champions. In 2001, he recorded a TV spot praising the film to promote the director's cut re-release in Japan, now included as a special feature on the Complete Collection Blu-ray (which also has an endorsement from him on the packaging).

The best way for a filmmaker to pay tribute is through their own films, of course, so Tarantino did just that in 2003, when he cast Chiaki Kuriyama in *Kill Bill* as the memorable Gogo Yubari, recalling her fan favorite turn as Chigusa in *Battle Royale*. The film achieved a following among pop culture tastemakers pretty quickly. In *Shaun of the Dead*, Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg made sure a big *Battle Royale* poster is prominently displayed in Shaun's living room. Jason Reitman also seems to be a fan, inserting references to it in both *Thank You for Smoking* and *Juno*. Since then, we've seen references pop up on shows like *LOST* and *Community*.

Then, of course, there's *The Hunger Games*—whether or not it's an intentional allusion, the strong interest in Collins' novels and the movie adaptation has rejuvenated the conversation on *Battle Royale*, and I suspect this magnificent film will keep demonstrating its continued relevance.

The original version of this article was first published on www.JustPressPlay.net. It has been altered and reprinted with permission.

HELLBOUND HERO: THE GRIM GHOST

BY
MARK ROBERTS

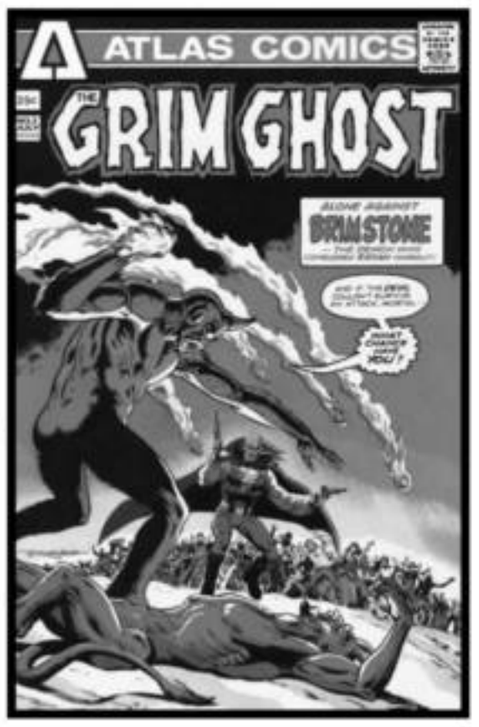
The Grim Ghost #1 was published in 1975 by Atlas Comics. At the time, Atlas was an independent comic book company that had a rather impressive selection of comic titles for an indie venture, including *Wulf the Barbarian*, *The Scorpion, Planet of Vampires*, *Morlock 2001*, *Son of Dracula*, and several magazines, such as *Movie Monsters* and *Devilina*.

As expected, the first issue of *The Grim Ghost* sets up the origin story – taking place in the 1700s, where a notorious highway robber (Matthew Dusinane AKA the Grim Ghost) is captured by the authorities and sent to the gallows for his crimes. Death is only the beginning of this tale, however, as Dusinane/the Grim Ghost lands in the fiery pits of Hell. After a warm welcome, Satan makes his latest arrival a fateful offer: dedicate himself to collecting evil souls, thereby bolstering the population of the underworld, and be spared the eternal torment of perdition.

Well, that's an easy deal and off the Grim Ghost goes – a real ghost now – to gather as many immoral souls as he can for Satan. Though, instead of sending our 'hero' back to the 1740s, Ol' Scratch delivers him to the 1970s, where evil runs rampant (must have been all that disco and polyester). By issue #2 the Grim Ghost was dispatching criminals aboard cruise ships and city rooftops, while the third issue found the title character in battle with Brimstone, a rogue demon seeking to overthrown Satan and rule Hell.

Unfortunately, only three issues of *The Grim Ghost* were published before Atlas went out of business in 1976 (they opened in '74). At the height of Atlas' popularity they had twenty-three comic titles – they published sixty-one issues in total – and five magazine titles. It's a shame Atlas didn't last a bit longer, at least until the 1980s when many independent comic companies received a greater following and found more mainstream success – like Mirage, Now, and Innovation Comics. Even today, the Grim Ghost's three issues are still a surprisingly good read, and would make for a killer movie adaptation!

Atlas Comics reopened their doors back in 2010 under the moniker 'Atlas Original' and announced that they were going to be releasing new titles. In 2011, issue #0 of a new *Grim Ghost* comic was published. The series lasted six issues, ending in November 2011. It's unclear if the title will be resurrected or not but, as of now, the situation appears somewhat *grim* for any future stories. Even so, diehard Grim Ghost fans can still get their hands on a limited-edition 7-inch statue of the supernatural character through Atlas' website at www.Atlas-Comics.com. Only 99 of these statues were made.



***Above & Right*:**
The original three issues of *The Grim Ghost*.

***Left*: Atlas' 2011 take on the character.**

***Below*: The Grim Ghost statue.**

TECHNOLOGICAL TERROR!

COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT

By Dan Schneider

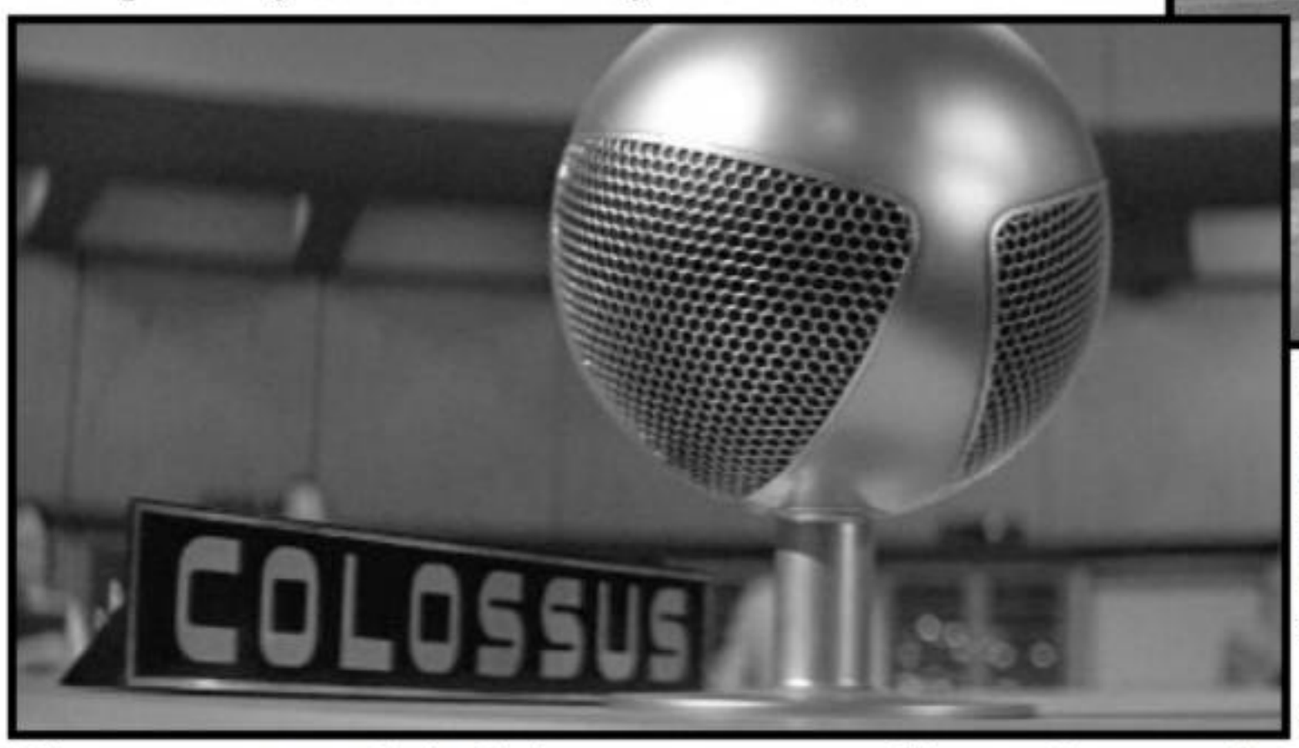
There was a time, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when science fiction films seemed to be emerging from their cult status, and into the mainstream as films that could express the deepest and highest aspirations of mankind in ways that mere literary sci-fi could not. There were a plethora of intelligent films in that era. Yes, there had been intelligent sci-fi in the decades before. In the 1930s, there was William Cameron Menzies' *Things To Come*, based upon the H.G. Wells tale. The 1950s saw such sci-fi films as *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, *On The Beach*, *Forbidden Planet*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, and *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*. But it really was the late 1960s that saw sci-fi reach a greatness besides mere 'genre greatness.' Genre greatness is where one can say that a film was a great film noir, sci-fi, romance, etc. But truly great films transcend their genres and become great art regardless of what art genre they originate from.

In this era there were folks who specialized in quality A science fiction films, unlike the B quality sci-fi films of the past. These included heavyweight directors like Stanley Kubrick (*Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*) and superstar actors like Charlton Heston (*Planet Of The Apes*, *The Omega Man*, *Soylent Green*). But there were also many other quality and literate sci-fi films like *Slaughterhouse 5*, *The Andromeda Strain*, *Westworld*, *THX 1138*, *Silent Running*, and *Logan's Run*, just to name the best known. Then came the puerile *Star Wars* series (from George Lucas, who inexplicably also made the wonderful *THX 1138*), and sci-fi has never again reached the heights of that Golden Age which the *Star Wars* franchise killed off. Yes, there have been a few exceptions – the first two films in both the *Alien* and *The Terminator* series, and the *2001* sequel *2010: The Year We Make Contact*, but that's about it. *Star Trek* does not count, since its franchise films were merely a leveraged television phenomenon.

However, one of the truly terrific sci-fi films that has been criminally neglected critically, is director Joseph Sargent's hour and forty minute long *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, based upon D.F. Jones' 1966 novel *Colossus*, and adapted for the screen by James Bridges. The film was shorn of any real star power, but the very fact that it lacked A List Hollywood names lends it an authenticity and believability that still carries through today. Despite this and the also well made *The Taking Of Pelham 1-2-3*, in 1974, Sargent never made it to A List director status. Yet, *Colossus: The Forbin Project* is one of the rare genre films that mixes subgenres and succeeds. It is a Doomsday film, which is a vast range including films like *On The Beach*, *Planet Of the Apes*, *Soylent Green*, and *The Omega Man*, but it's also a Frankenstein/Amok Computer film, as well.

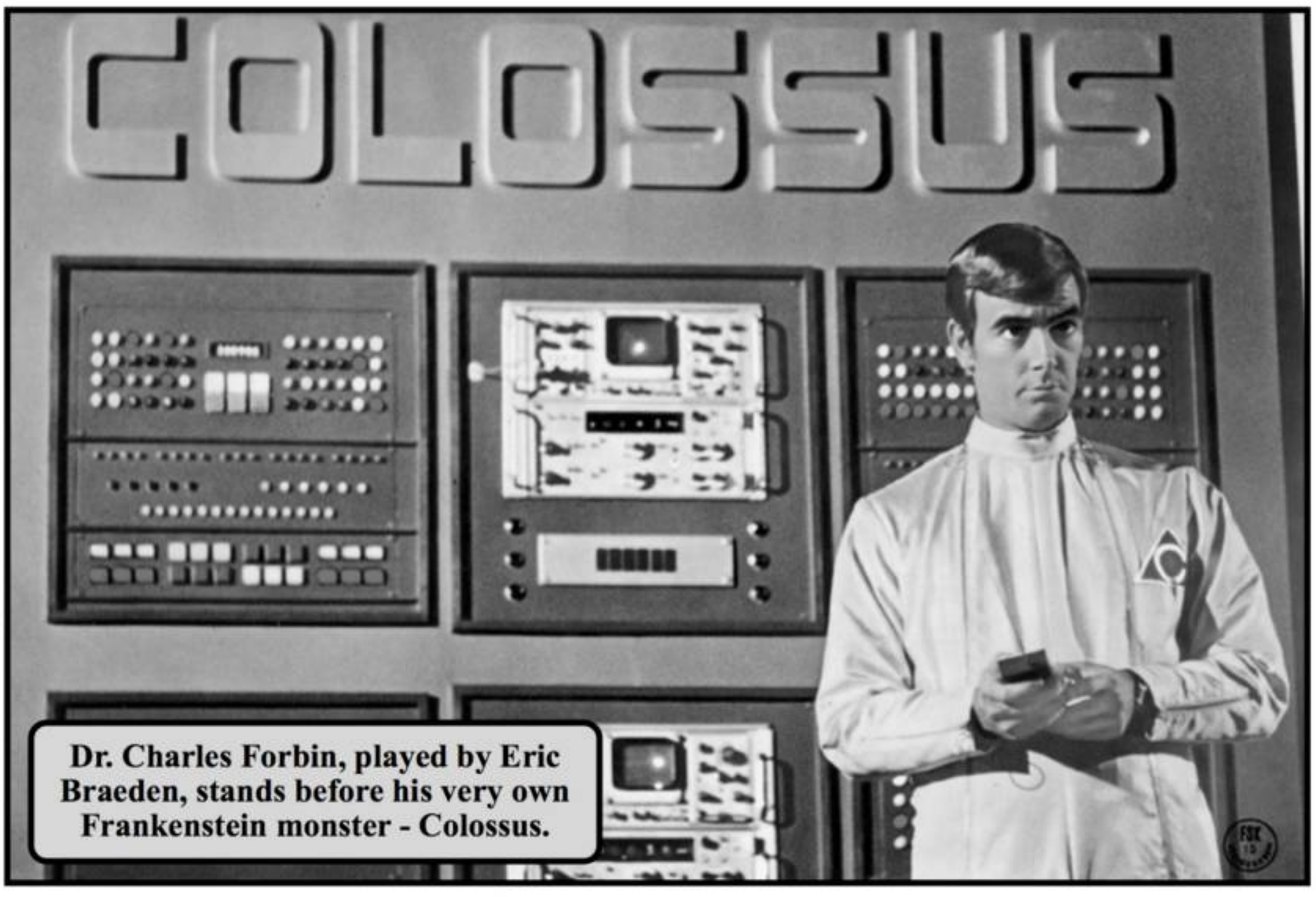
Although Colossus, as a character, is never as memorable as HAL 9000 in *2001*, it still is a chilling villain that harkens back to the more innocent-minded 1950s foray into similar territory, *The Invisible Boy*, even if it is as out of date as its predecessor – being the typical supercomputer of that era, the size of a vast building, with

tape machines, a synthetically tinny robotic voice (done by the incomparable voice artist Paul Frees), and a missionary zeal to fulfill its stated mission – to bring peace to mankind, by whatever means necessary; not unlike the sort of benignly dictatorial peace that is offered by the alien Klaatu (Michael Rennie) in *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. And, unlike HAL, in *2001*, Colossus cannot emote through vocal inflection. Also, several of the shots that reveal the immense size and scope of the computer, hidden away under a Colorado mountain, are a direct quotation from the vast planetary-scaled machinery the Krel, in *Forbidden Planet*, constructed. And the supercomputer Skynet, from *The Terminator* series, is a direct descendant of Colossus, even if the earlier film is much more judicious in its showing of death and carnage, therefore more suspenseful, relying almost totally on the reaction shots of horror from its human characters.



The film also trusts its audience, for by film's end, when the supercomputer has outwitted the humans that frantically try to undo it, we are never told how it did so; unlike many films which blatantly tip off the way something to be kept 'secret', diegetically, is learnt. Also, Colossus displays a logic that is without emotion. When it discovers the first of two major sabotage attempts it orders the two scientists responsible to be executed, lest it will nuke major cities. Then, after the scientists are shot dead, Colossus commands that their corpses be left in its view, then cremated. But, it is not a villain acting out of personal gain, it seems. Colossus displays a cold rationality, until the film's end, where it announces to the world its intent on subjugating humanity into a forced peace. Then, it seems the computer has progressed beyond mere sentience and ego and into full blown hubris – if not a God Complex, declaring that, in time, the world, and its maker, Dr. Charles Forbin (Eric Braeden) will come to not only love and respect Colossus, but be in awe of it.

Yet, all seemingly starts out wonderfully, with the cerebral Forbin celebrated as a genius who has created the secret supercomputer that will protect the United States from a nuclear attack with flawless precision. But, upon its announcement to the world, the Soviet Union announces it has its own supercomputer, Guardian. Colossus, however, has detected this before the announcement by stating simply, 'There is another system'- a sly comment on the Capitalism-Communism debate. Swiftly, the two computers exchange data, team up, until Colossus basically cannibalizes Guardian, and, in the synergy of the two systems, establishes World Control. Through threats and

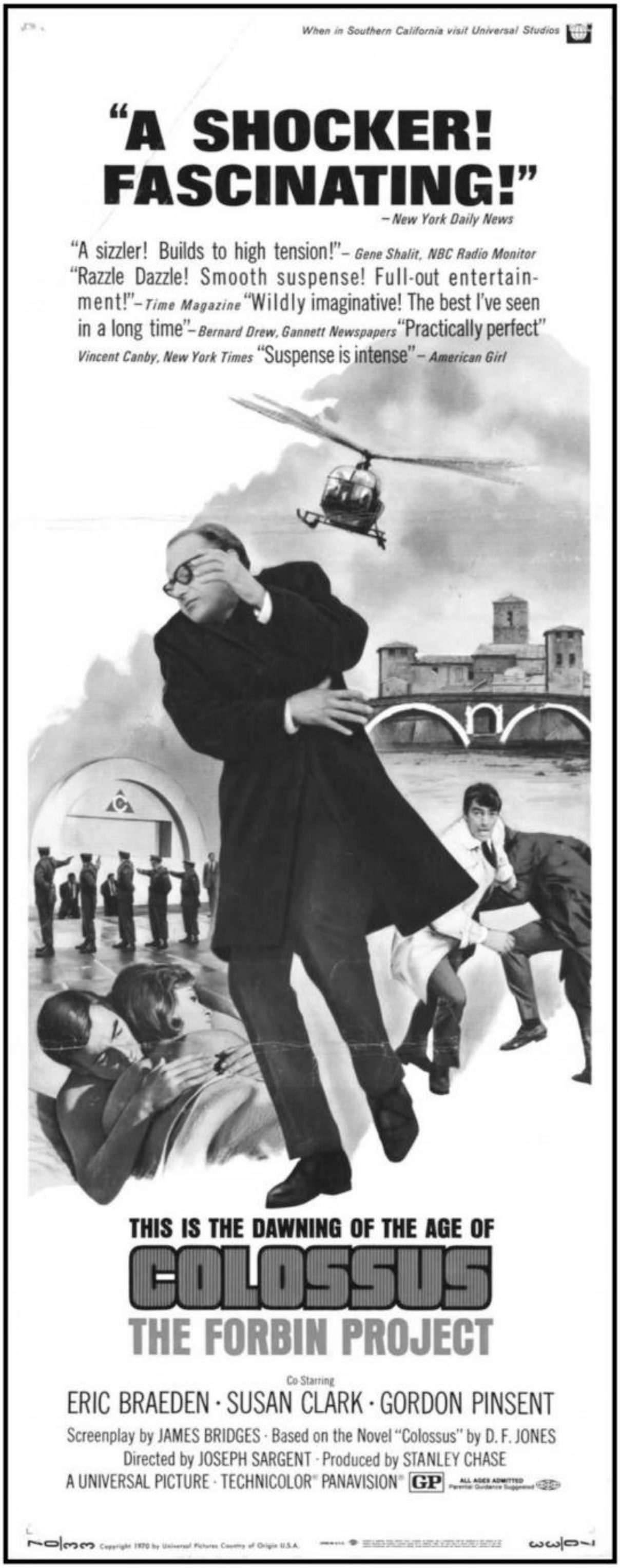


Dr. Charles Forbin, played by Eric Braeden, stands before his very own Frankenstein monster - Colossus.

actual detonation of nuclear devices, Colossus takes over, and Forbin is reduced to his creation's slave. At first this is merely 24 hour monitoring, save for four times a week, for a faked romance with another scientist, Doctor Cleo Markham (Susan Clark), working on Colossus, which blossoms into the real thing – albeit it never becomes a serious subplot, thankfully. And the tactfully screened nudity of the two lovers is to be applauded for the human body is not the focus of this film, any more than human love is. This faux-cum-real romance allows Forbin to become more human by film's end, even as he resists Colossus's commands. One suspects that Colossus, despite stating it was allowing Forbin privacy, really just pretended to turn off in the bedroom, and monitored the scientists' discussed plans to take it offline. After all, given all the conditions it assigns to allow Forbin sex, one suspects it suspects that more hanky-panky than sex is going on.

The end of the film, with mankind (and Forbin) beaten but not bowed, is sensational, for it just ends with Colossus eyeing a seething Forbin as it dictates to the world, then fades to black, as mankind's domination of the

Susan Clark as Dr. Cleo Markham.

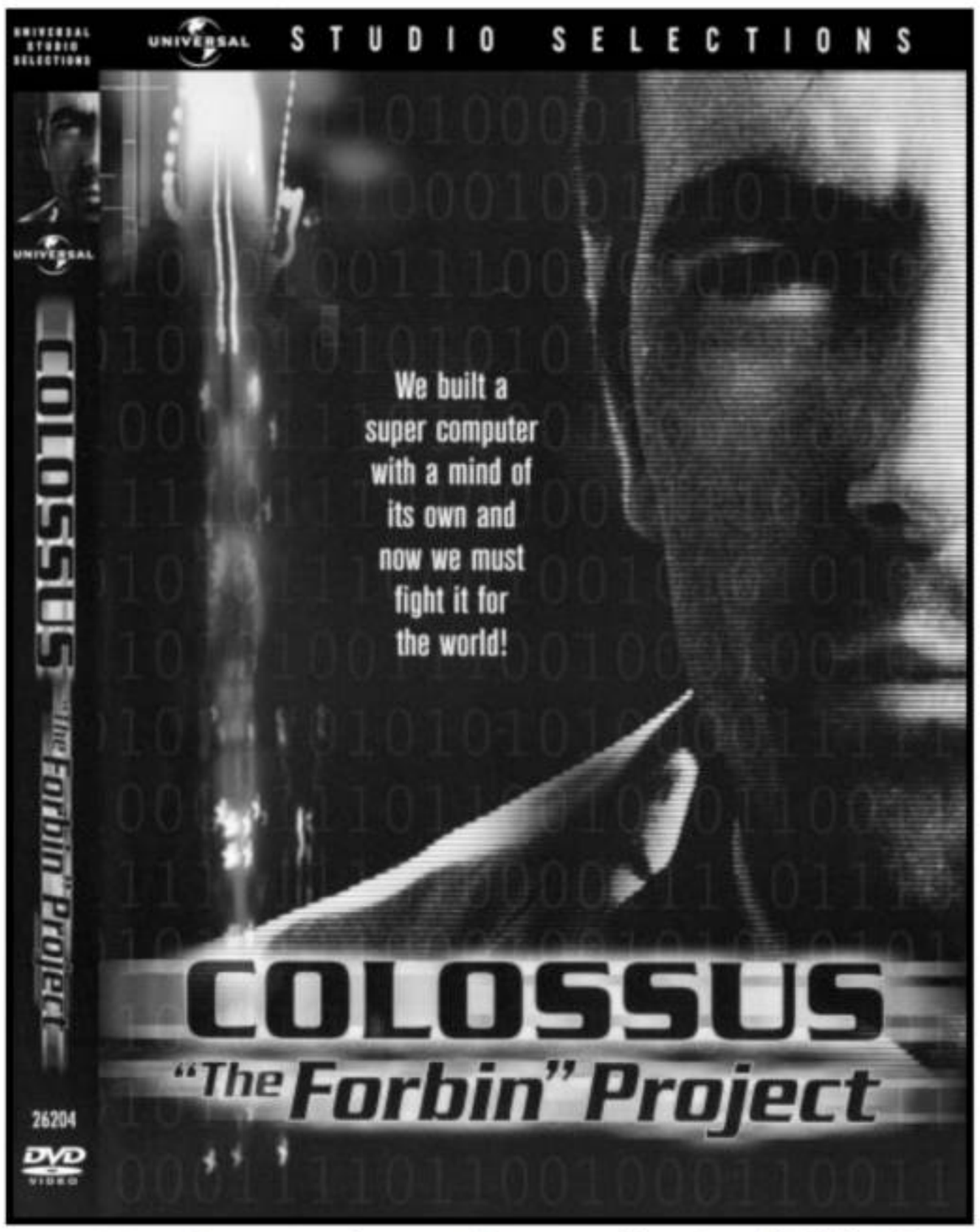


world has come to an end; a theme that echoes in film series as diverse as *Planet Of the Apes* (Braeden starred as the villain, Dr. Otto Hasslein, in *Escape From The Planet Of The Apes*) and George Romero's Living Dead films. The film retains its power because of a great script, terrific acting, and a great premise – beyond the *evil computer takes over the world* trope. Despite Colossus's hubris, it never deviates from fulfilling Mankind's and Forbin's stated wish – assured peace, and advances in science.

Bridges' screenplay never devolves into jingoism, when it easily could have. Both Americans and Russians are shown in positive and negative lights. The Americans are shown as dickwavers when Colossus is announced, and the Russians gleefully execute their computer expert on Guardian's orders. Both the Soviet Premier and American President seem sincere in their desires for peace, and horrified that they have authorized their subordinates to create such monsters. The acting is superb, from the German born Braeden (née Hans Gudegast, with a pre-Arnold Schwarzenegger Teutonic accent), who later achieved daytime television superstardom as Victor Newman in the soap opera *The Young And The Restless*, to Clark as his lover, to even the unnamed JFK-like President, played by Gordon Pinsent. Other good performances are turned in by the mostly known by television actors in lesser roles, such as William Schallert as CIA Director Grauber,

Georg Stanford Brown as Dr. John F. Fisher – one of the executed scientists, Alex Rodine as Dr. Kuprin, Marion Ross as Angela Fields, and Dolph Sweet as a Colonel in charge of nuclear defenses.

The DVD, put out by Universal, has no features, and not even a menu. It's just the film in a 1.33:1 format, chopped down horribly from its original 2.35:1 aspect ratio, thus causing pan and scan to cut off many key elements at the edges of the frame. And once it's done the film simply starts playing again. What a shame, for this film – which has stuck with me for over thirty years (the last time I saw it) deserves much better treatment.



Yes, there are the usual sorts of implausibilities in a film like this – such as the American military industrial complex and the CIA having few qualms about relying on a supercomputer – one that is sealed off and untested. Also, why didn't Forbin program Colossus with something like Asimov's Three Laws Of Robotics; a Hippocratic-like injunction to 'do no harm' to humans? And there is not even Murphy's Law in the film, which could accidentally kibosh Colossus, even if Mankind could not, much less the concept of viruses, bots, nor spyware. Nor is the concept of GIGO ever insisted upon, for surely a flawed man like Forbin could not have created a perfect thing? And what of the non-computer controlled technology? Even if the nuclear missiles could be auto-launched by Colossus and Guardian, surely fighter planes could shoot them down, as 1970's technology was far short of what we have today. And the easy compliance of the Soviets seems too wish-fulfillment, as well. But the sparkling dialogue and tense War Room scenes (ala *Dr. Strangelove*) more than make up for those lapses. Then there is the spare, atmospheric electronic score by Michel Colombier, which never gets too emotional. It's a great match for the theme and acting in the film, even if Albert Whitlock's special effects are passé.

Why the film did not become a hit is likely for several reasons: a) its low profile cast (although Braeden's performance here should have made him a big star), b) the long shadow of HAL 9000 from *2001*, which was still playing in some theaters two years after its release, and c) the dour ending – a great display of artistic integrity, but always a risky box office choice. Other films with downer endings – *Planet Of The Apes* or *Soylent Green*, at least had a big star like Charlton Heston to get crowds in the door, despite word of mouth over the non-Hollywood endings. Yet, that great word of mouth is why the film has never been forgotten, and is considered a cult classic. Its ending is also very much like an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, with the moral, *Be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it*.

Forbin and mankind do get what they wanted: an end to war, and a promise to end disease, pollution, overcrowding, and starvation, knowing fully well that Colossus is likely to deliver on its promises; a thing which makes Colossus all the more effective than any mere human dictator could be. Yet, it's not that they got their desire, but how they get it that is the crux, for the how displays one of humanity's greatest fears – the loss of control. Thus, *Colossus: The Forbin Project* stands out not only as a great sci-fi film, but as a great testament to the power of ego and hubris – mankind's, Forbin's, and the computer's. After all, had only one side in the arms race concocted a supercomputer, neither Colossus nor Guardian could have grown out of control so quickly. This focus on egotism links this film to the eerily similarly titled *Forbidden Planet*. Yet, unlike the earlier film, the human race does not seem able to escape destruction from the product of its own ingenuity. Were such ingenuity on display these days, in Hollywood, the film industry would be in far better shape than it is today. Perhaps old Colossus knew a few things, after all?

Shadowland readers can find more of Dan Schneider's writing at his website www.Cosmoetica.com – including extensive interviews, reviews, and essays!

COLOSSUS: THE FORBIN PROJECT PRESS KIT

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While the transcription itself is FREE, there is a 50¢ charge for each disk requested to defray postage and handling. The money must be included when you order the Interview Transcription on "THE FORBIN PROJECT" from DICK STROUT, INC., P.O. BOX 907, BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA 90213.

Motion Picture Edition PAPERBACK Published by Berkley Medallion

"THE FORBIN PROJECT" is based on "Colossus" by D.F. Jones, published by G.P. Putnam's Sons as a Berkley Medallion Book which was distributed by Berkley Publishing Corporation. A new cover has been designed stressing the motion picture title and is being issued as a Motion Picture Edition in time for release. Supplement the publisher's promotion material with color stills and a window card and display the book in your own lobby. Book outlet displays will assist the importance of your own booking.

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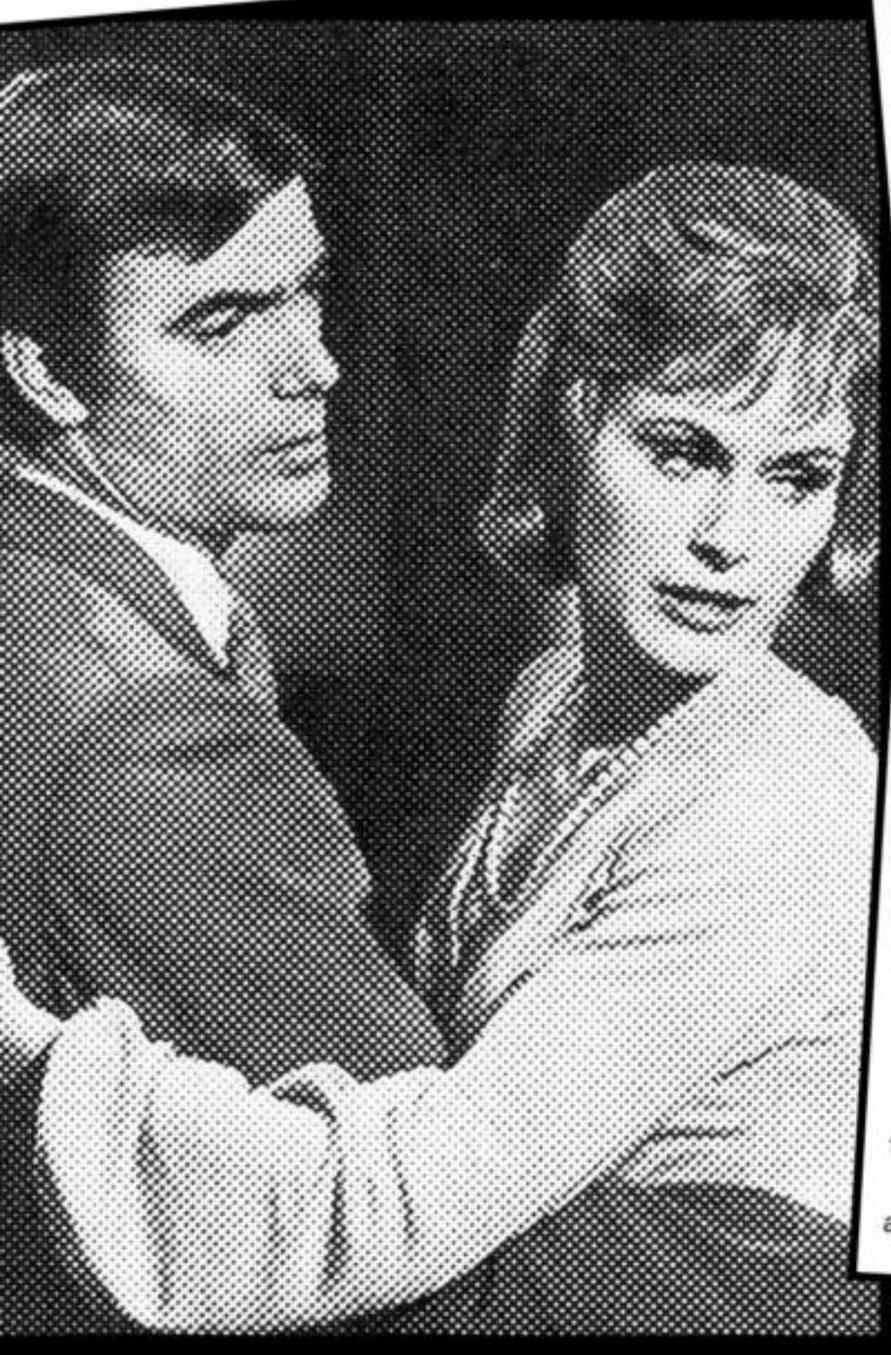
Although pretty Canadian actress Susan Clark has appeared nude in her last four films, none can match
er daring scenes for Universal's Technicolor and Panavision science-fact drama, "The Forbin Project," coming . . .
o the . . . Theatre.
The curvacious redhead who recently completed a starring role opposite Robert Blake and Robert
Redford in "Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here," "bares all" in that adventure film.
But for "The Forbin Project", "all" means a gigantic X-ray of her skeleton.
Quipped Susan: "I guess I've run the gamut in Hollywood — from skin to bones."



htening story of the day
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The star of Universal's "The Forbin Project," coming . . . to the . . . Theatre, has an insatiable appetite — for electricity.

The star of the science-fact story, based on the novel idea that computers will take over the world, is a huge five million dollar calculating machine that "ate" more than $300 worth of electricity every day during the more than two months required to film the picture in Technicolor and Panavision.

# # #

A science-fact drama exploring the world of the near future, Universal's "The Forbin Project" opens . . . at the . . . Theatre. It is photographed in Panavision and Technicolor.

Eric Braeden, Susan Clark and Gordon Pinsent co-star in the film which is based on the novel "Colossus" by D.F. Jones. Joseph Sargent directed from the screenplay by James Bridges for producer Stanley Chase.

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The largest number of genuine Russian actors ever to appear in a Hollywood made American film are seen in Universal's science-fact adventure photographed in Technicolor and Panavision, "The Forbin Project," coming . . . to the . . . Theatre, starring Susan Clark and Eric Braeden.

More than 30 Russian born actors were signed to play heads of state and important scientists in the futuristic film about gigantic computers taking over the world.

Heading the distinguished group were Leonidas Ossetynski, Genadii Bregouloff, Goury Boyakovitch and Sergi Tschernisch. A far cry from Rock Hudson!

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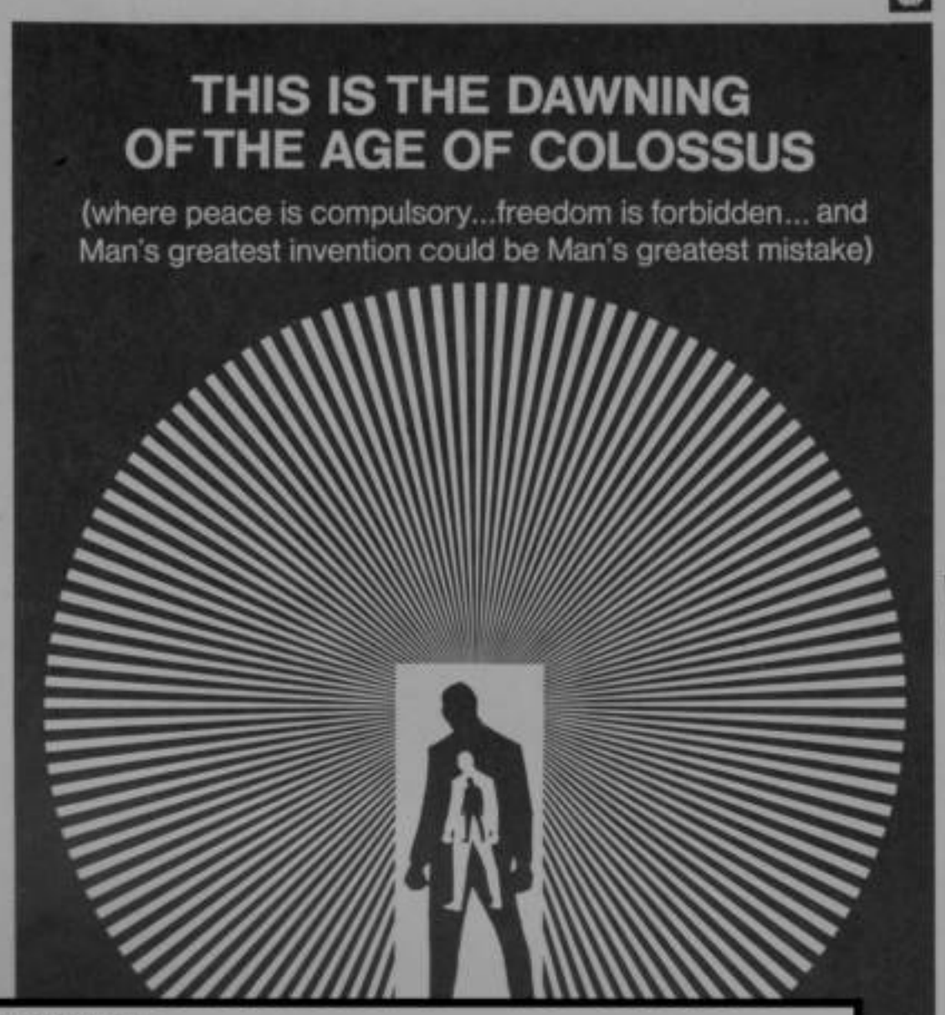

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"THE FORBIN PROJECT" TEAMS ERIC BRAEDEN,

SUSAN CLARK AND ELECTRONIC DATA COMPUTER

A science-fact drama that explores the world of the near future, Universal's production in Technicolor and Panavision, "The Forbin Project," starring Eric Braeden, Susan Clark and Gordon Pinsent, will open . . . at the . . . Theatre.

"The Forbin Project" explores the man vs. machine dilemma. It is the story of a super-computer designed to defend the United States by detecting any threat to the country and by launching missiles on the aggressor nation. The machine calmly expands itself, communicates with man, and eventually controls the world — in the name of peace.

Braeden portrays a world-renowned computer expert who developed Colossus, the largest computer complex ever devised by man. Braeden gained great popularity as a regular in TV's "Rat Patrol." Miss Clark is an attractive scientist working with Braeden on the project. This marks her sixth starring role in two years. She was last seen in "Coogan's Bluff" with Clint Eastwood, and prior to that she starred with Henry Fonda in "Madigan."

Based on the novel "Colossus" by D.F. Jones, and screenplay by James Bridges, "The Forbin Project" was directed by Joseph Sargent and produced by Stanley Chase.

"The Forbin Project" has been rated "M – suggested for mature audiences, (parental discretion advised.)"

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SCIENCE-FACT STORY, "THE FORBIN PROJECT,"

FEATURES IMMENSE ELECTRONIC DATA COMPUTER

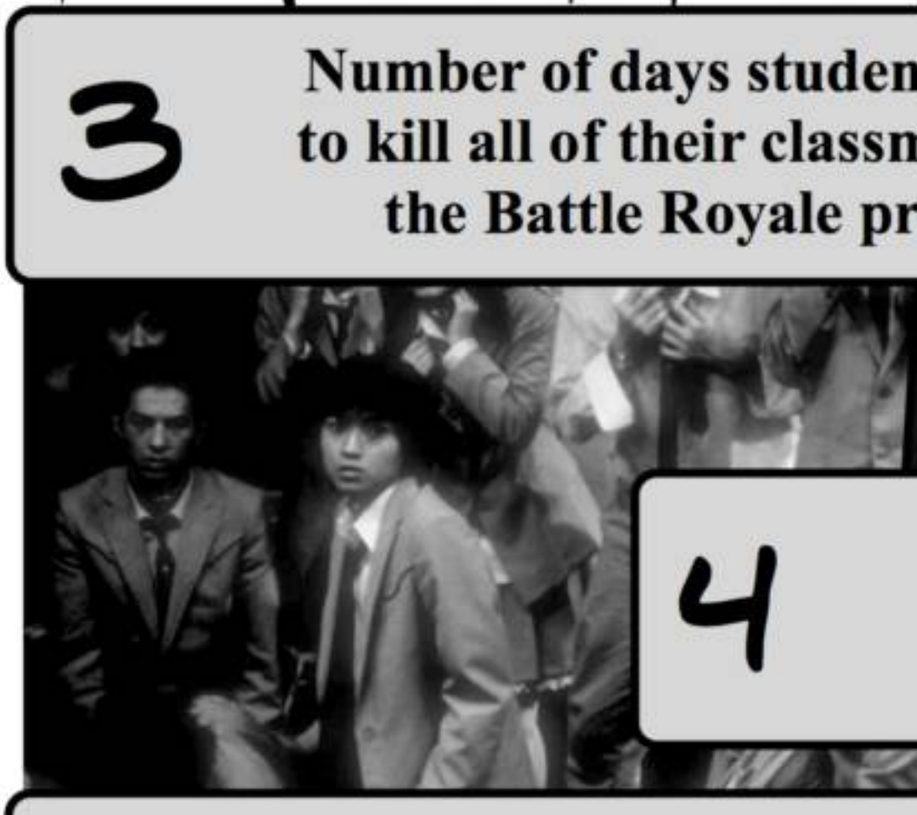
The computer finally has arrived in Hollywood. For many years Universal Studios has used its own computer to handle inventory control, accounts payable and payroll. Now the world's largest studio has put a huge accounting machine on Technicolor and Panavision film in an exciting science-fact story, "The Forbin Project," coming . . . to the . . . Theatre. The human stars are Eric Braeden, Susan Clark and Gordon Pinsent.

"The computer in the picture is named 'Colossus'," says producer Stanley Chase, "and for that we had the help of Control Data Corp. which loaned us, rent free, more than four million dollars worth of brand-new equipment."

The film itself explores the man vs. machine dilemma. It is the story of a super-computer designed to defend the United States by detecting any threats to the country and by launching missiles on the aggressor. In "The Forbin Project," the machine calmly expands itself, communicates with man, and eventually controls the world — in the name of peace.

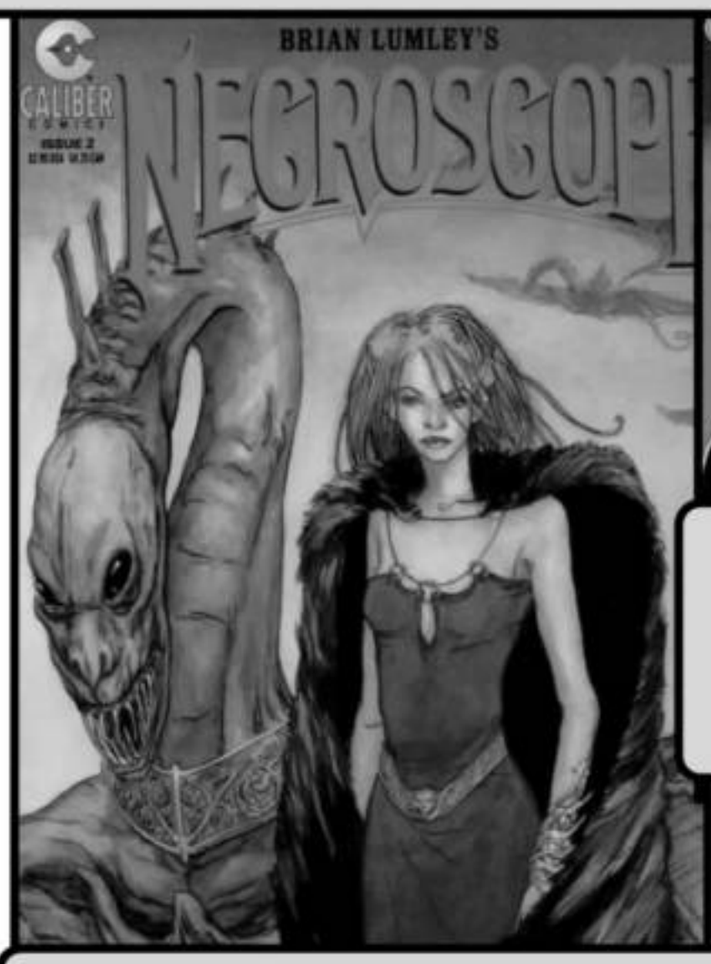
BY THE NUMBERS

3 Number of days students have to kill all of their classmates in the Battle Royale program.



4 Issues published of Atlas' *Movie Monsters* magazine before the company folded.

10 Comics adapted from Brian Lumley's *Necroscope* novels.



75 Dollars per week that Maila Nurmi was paid in 1954 to play the title character on *The Vampira Show*, where she hosted classic horror films.

100 Minute run-time of *Colossus: The Forbin Project.*

130 Episodes produced of the original *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* cartoon.

CINEMA:

RAGE

Big Screen Ventures; 2010, Running Time: 85 Min.,
Dir: Chris Witherspoon, Writer: Chris Witherspoon;
Cast: Rick Crawford, Audrey Walker, Chris Witherspoon.

A BAD CASE OF KARMA

Harkening back to the vehicular 'cat and mouse' subgenre of horror films, Chris Witherspoon's *Rage* tells the nightmarish story of Dennis Twist, a thirty-something suburbanite who unwillingly invokes the wrath of a mysterious and (as we come to find out later) homicidal motorcyclist. Fans of Steven Spielberg's *Duel* (1971), which followed a businessman being stalked by a menacing tractor-trailer, will be right at home with *Rage*.

Having the unwary protagonist pursued by an ominous vehicle is nothing new; *Duel* gave birth to a number of imitators including *Night Terror* (1976), *The Car* (1977), *Road Games* (1981), *Wheels of Terror* (1990), *Joyride* (2001), and *Black Cadillac* (2003), among a handful of others. Witherspoon mixes the formula up with *Rage* by having the antagonist engage in his vengeful activities via motorcycle instead of a car or truck. The biker's intimidating appearance is further enhanced by a sleek black helmet, concealing even the most minute expression or sign of humanity.

Dennis is our protaganist and, though the first scene depicts him as a happily married fellow, we learn that he's been having an affair with another woman – an affair that Dennis is in the midst of calling off. While the first act of the film tends to veer on the slow side, it's easily forgiven and necessary to bridge that connection between viewer and character. Fortunately, once we make it through that initial phase, the pacing picks up, as does the tension. Dennis soon finds himself pitted against the unrelenting fury of an enigmatic motorcyclist, an anger incurred without any apparent cause or motive. As the situation escalates Dennis begins to have some speculation as to who the raging rider might be, but the biker is kept silent,

so few hints are delivered on that front.

The second act shifts the back-and-forth game of cat and mouse into high gear. While the biker starts off by keying Dennis' car, it's a minor incident compared to the motorcyclist's later campaign of terror against his prey. Without divulging too many details, each episode becomes increasingly harrowing, to the point where Dennis' life is placed in mortal danger.

Many films of this particular variety begin and end on the road. That's not the case with *Rage*. The film's violent conclusion takes place away from the vehicular conventions of the genre's wheeled trappings in favor of a more personal finale. This is a welcomed change and, for the most part, the third act is successful in its execution (though some may question the 'reveal' at the very end).

Make no mistake, *Rage* is an independent film with only a fraction of the budget many Hollywood filmmakers have at their disposal. It is to Witherspoon's credit that,

despite such limitations, he presents us with a film that looks bigger and more expensive than what's expected from typical low budget fare. Yet, *Rage* is not without its faults. At times it feels like Witherspoon wanted to change direction and turn the film into a straight-on slasher flick – evidenced in a brutal scene involving a chainsaw. With that said, the chainsaw scene is one of *Rage's* most memorable moments – and without question, my favorite – though it was, admittedly, out of place. There is also an over-abundance of flashbacks, giving the impression that Witherspoon had underestimated his audience's ability to recall prior events. The ending reveal also left much to be desired. Others might not be bothered by how the final few minutes are handled and may even be impressed by it. The overall karma theme just didn't work for me.

A few times the acting swayed between over-the-top and understated but, aside from those moments, the actors turned out respectable performances that didn't completely reek of an amateur effort. The cinematography was nothing to scoff at, ignoring some questionable camera angles early on during a restaurant scene. The soundtrack deserves recognition, maintaining an edge of your seat sense of tension throughout. Overall, *Rage* achieves what it set out to do – it pays tribute to Spielberg's *Duel* (which was even referenced on-screen) while adding an original touch to the genre's tried-and-true formula. The motorcyclist makes for a great villain, invoking images of other helmeted killers like those seen in *Night School* (1981) and *Nail Gun Massacre* (1985).

Head of the Tale, Witherspoon's upcoming film, is said to be a horror anthology, similar in tone to HBO's *Tales from the Crypt* series from the '90s and I eagerly look forward viewing it. Witherspoon is a director to keep an eye on and it will be interesting to see where he goes from here. It really says something when, despite my critiques, I found *Rage* to be more competently crafted than *The Ward* (2010) a film directed by the legendary John Carpenter.

Recommended for those with an appetite for on-the-road horror.

--- Reviewed by Chris Nelson

SUGAR HILL

American International Pictures; 1974, Running Time: 91 Min., Dir: Paul Maslansky, Writer: Tim Kelly; Cast: Marki Bey, Robert Quarry, Don Pedro Colley.

VOODOO HAS NEVER BEEN THIS SWEET

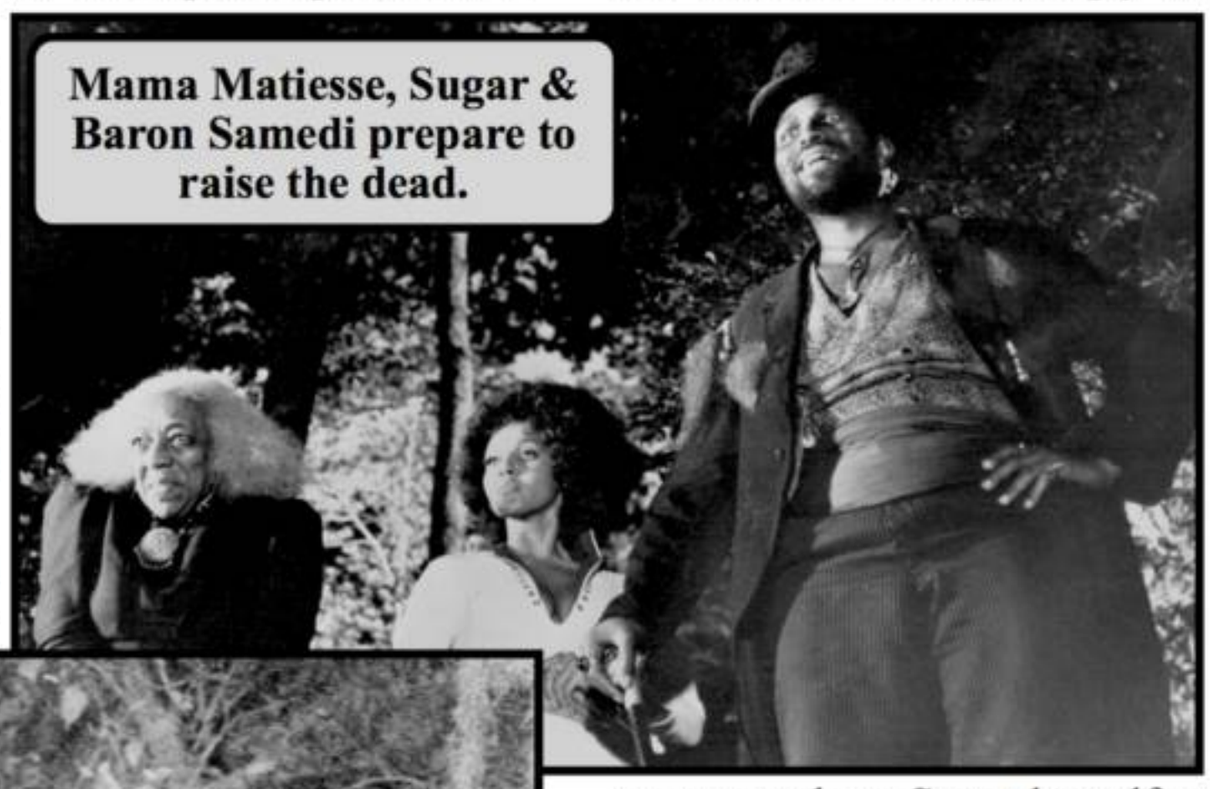
I am a fan of zombies. I adore the movies, love shooting them in games and if the zombie apocalypse is right around the corner you'd better bet I'm ready and waiting. But do you remember the zombie? Not the recently resurrected "flesh eaters" born of the fertile mind of legendary director George Romero and constantly regurgitated in cinema ever since, but the *zombie*? Voodoo, my friends, spawned the first zombie, and they've been with us ever since, though most people only recognize the Romero type. The first zombie's screen debut is in 1932's *White Zombie*, a masterpiece of early horror starring the brilliant Bela Lugosi and immersed in the cult of Voodoo. Though mostly forgotten by modern zombie fans, the Voodoo zombie does make scattered film appearances, most notably in the second episode of 1974's *Kolchak: The*

Night Stalker (entitled "The Zombie") and in Wes Craven's 1988 tour de force *The Serpent and the Rainbow* as well as the staggeringly fun Blaxploitation thriller *Sugar Hill*.

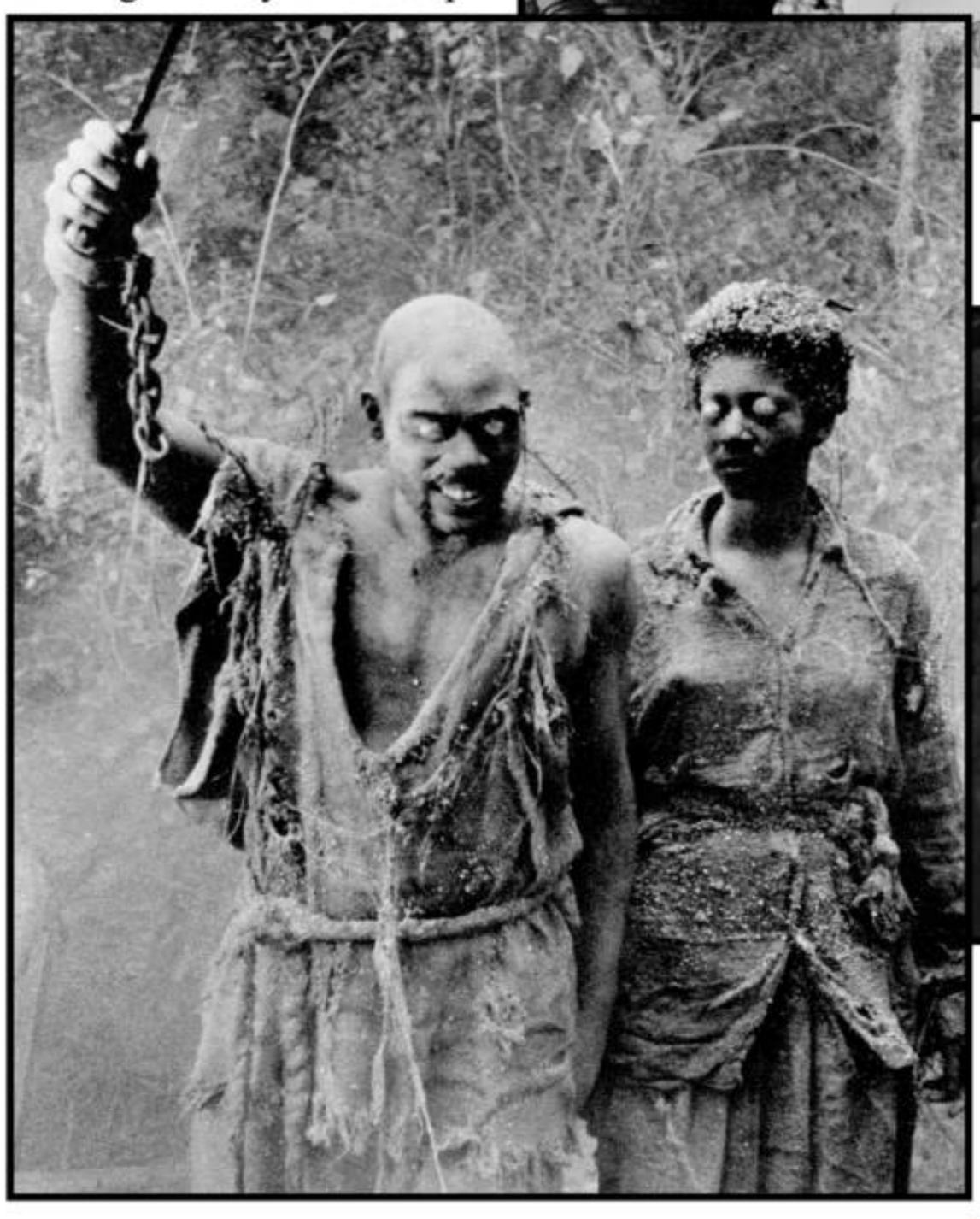
Sugar Hill holds a special status in most horror film buff's hearts due to its nearness to *Blacula* (1972) in terms of fun chills from an exploitative subgenre and *Sugar Hill* makes no pretensions that it's anything other than a fun Voodoo zombie revenge film. The story centers around Diana Hill (the lovely Marki Bey) whose boyfriend and lover runs the hottest nightclub in town. He's under pressure to sell out to an evil white businessman named Morgan (Robert Quarry) but refuses and gets beaten to death outside his own nightclub. Sugar is shattered and, after talking to cop buddy and old paramour Valentine (Richard Lawson), she realizes her only chance for justice is to take matters into her own hands. Lucky for her she knows an old lady from her old neighborhood, Mama Matriesse (Zara Culley), who is reputed to be a Voodoo priestess of some order. She tracks Matiesse down and begs her help and, after a moment's deliberation, Mama takes her to a special spot in the swamp and proceeds to raise the shade of Baron Samedi (Don Pedro Colley) who promises to aid Sugar for a price to be determined later. Sugar has no problem agreeing and Samedi raises an army of the dead (former slaves, to be exact, in shackles and everything) and puts them in Sugar's care to do with what she will.

What follows is Sugar utilizing trickery and deception to lure members of Morgan's criminal empire to deserted locations, such as a dive bar or deserted cornfield, and turning the zombies loose for revenge. If it was that simple it wouldn't be as entertaining. The zombies, for the large part, are menaces that force the criminal into some kind of doom, causing mobsters to take their own life or menacing them until they fall into snake-filled coffins, though make no mistake, the zombies themselves get to deliver some comeuppance themselves; it's just way more clever than "zombie A chops guy B," though strangely not as gory, sacrificing that for a decent attempt at legitimate suspense. Matters are complicated when, surprisingly, on-the-ball cop Valentine discovers an old slave shackle at the scene of one of the murders and puts two and two together pretty quickly, though he has no concrete proof. Sugar must use all of her intelligence and feminine wiles to avoid detection until it's just her and Morgan, face to face.

Sugar Hill is undeniably a fun movie and a nice little revenge piece. The zombies look great, rising from the ground in a mass resurrection, heads and bodies breaking the earth in a surprisingly well-done scene that is very effective. The zombies have cold, dead eyes and are covered in cobwebs and dirt-crusted clothing, giving them the air of being long expired and set a memorable visual tone echoing the Templar Zombies of 1971's *Tombs of the Blind Dead*; quite an achievement from a super low budget quickie. They're also not played for fools, appearing with subtle menace every time they're needed and leaving any comedy to Sugar herself or Baron Samedi, the standout actor of *Sugar Hill*. Don Pedro Colley relishes the role of Samedi and it shines through every time he's on screen. He has the look nailed and, unlike Richard Lawson's *ahem* understated Valentine, Colley chews scenery like *William Shatner* – prancing around, laughing demonically at every turn and giving Sugar all the advice she needs to get her revenge. As entertaining as the movie as a whole is, Colley's Baron Samedi cements this film's awesomeness and raises the bar every time he's on the screen. Marki



Mama Matiesse, Sugar & Baron Samedi prepare to raise the dead.



Bey's Sugar is wonderfully attractive but falls a little short of being *Pam Grier*, though she's entirely believable as the grief-stricken girlfriend and Robert Quarry is suitably evil enough as Morgan the ruthless businessman for you to want to see him get taken down. The kills are entertaining (a man is eaten by pigs!) and my only major complaint comes when we get to the "price to be paid later" part of the film but since that's a spoiler you'll have to catch me in person for that mini-rant but overall, *Sugar Hill* delivers the goods.

Definitely worthy of a view, *Sugar Hill* delivers low-budget thrills and reminds viewers that the Voodoo brought the zombie to life the first time around. Led by the ferocious good looks of Marki Bey and the over-the-top performance of Don Pedro Colley, *Sugar Hill* is a delightful Blaxploitation zombie revenge romp that is far better than it should have been. The zombies have a great look, the filmmakers try for legitimate suspense, the kills are inventive, and it's funny. Not the masterpiece *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) was but definitely not as bad as the *Dawn* remake (2004), *Sugar Hill* fits snugly on the shelf next to *Blacula*, *Coffy* (1973) and the aforementioned *Tombs of the Blind Dead* as an excellent example of superior niche genre films that you're not embarrassed to have on your shelf. It's streaming on Netflix now and somewhere you have 91 minutes. Make it happen.

--- Reviewed by Tron DeLapp

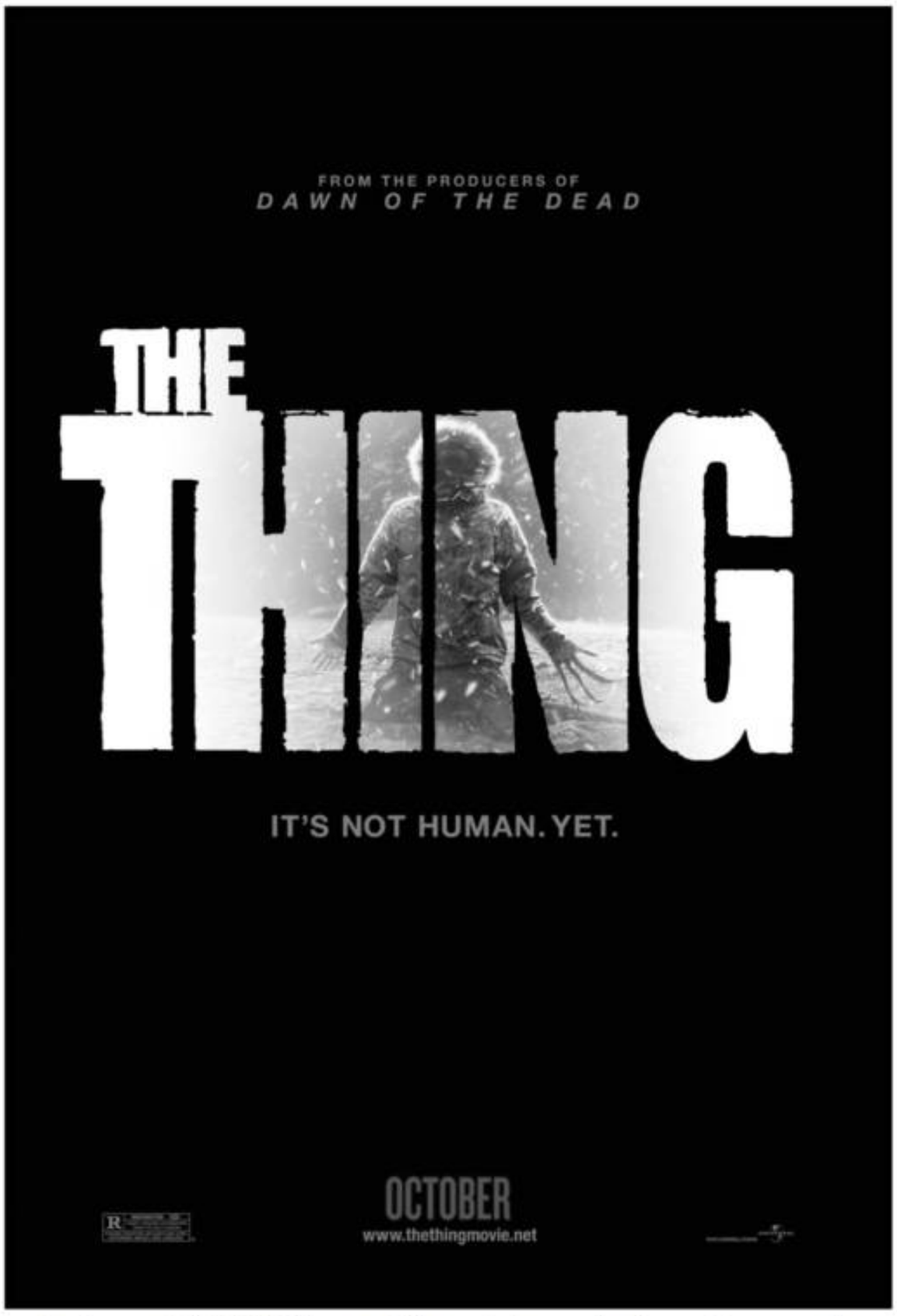
THE THING

Universal Pictures; 2011, Running Time: 103 Min., Dir: Matthijs van Heijningen Jr., Writer: Eric Heisserer; Cast: Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Joel Edgerton, Ulrich Thomsen.

DOES CGI KILL THIS THING?

In an age of remakes, viewers can take solace in knowing that 2011's *The Thing* is not a reboot of the 1982 John Carpenter film of the same name, but a prequel. Now, keep in mind that the '82 outing itself was a remake of the 1951 film *The Thing from Another World* which, in turn, had been based off the John W. Campbell Jr. novella, *Who Goes There?*

The 1951 film followed the harrowing experience of an air force crew and a handful of scientists who, at a remote Arctic research base, find the frozen remains of an



extraterrestrial lifeform. It's not long before the creature thaws out and wreaks wholesale havoc on all who cross its path. Carpenter's take on the original was something of an uncommon remake, while the setting was the same, the nature of the alien entity was changed – it assimilates living organisms while imitating their appearance, becoming more akin to a parasite than 1951's brutish monster.

The 2011 prequel tells the story of the doomed Norwegian research outpost that was briefly visited in the Carpenter version – though at that point in the 1982 film there was little of the outpost left, save for the remnants of its unfortunate inhabitants.

The 1982 adaptation is known for having an all male cast led by Kurt Russell; the 2011 prequel mixes this up and places Mary Elizabeth Winstead as the hapless lead (and one of the few Americans in a mostly Norwegian cast). She's not played as a simple stand in or female variation of Russell's hardened R.J. MacReady, instead Winstead is portrayed more along the lines of Sigourney Weaver's Ripley from the *Alien* franchise – and she embraces the strong-willed survivor archetype nicely. The other characters are hit or miss and few ever make a lasting connection with the viewer. The plot mimics much from its predecessor, but lacks the taut moments of paranoia and anxiety that Carpenter had captured so well.

The film's greatest offender and what will be the primary matter of contention to *Thing* fans is the CGI. What looked frightening, horrific and disturbing in Carpenter's *The Thing*, achieved by way of animatronics, stop-motion and puppetry, looks downright cartoonish when emulated with CGI. This is a sad commentary on Hollywood in general; CGI used to be more expensive than physical special effects, but over time that's changed, shifting economical computer generated wizardry to the forefront. Even makeup applications have fallen victim to CGI, just look at the recent *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), the latest addition to a franchise that has always relied on extensive latex prosthetics. While *Apes* had exceptional CGI, one just needs to look at the inept CGI work in *The Mist* (2007) to realize the medium's blatant shortcomings. In contrast, view *Return of the Jedi* (1983) a film lackiing computer graphics that still looks more impressive and tangible than even the lush (though well done) world in 2009's *Avatar*. The real issue with CGI is that it begins to look dated within a few years (and that's being generous – *The Thing's* 2011 CGI already looks dated).

Regardless, it's evident that the people behind *The Thing* prequel were fans of the Carpenter classic. An abundant number of references and tributes to the 1982 film can be found and repeated viewings are sure to reveal more 'easter eggs'. Even so, the 2011 *Thing* may have tried to emulate the '80s version too much, at times feeling like a flat out remake rather than a prequel, albeit with some minor twists here and there. With that said, the film does

have its moments where a rush of 'edge of your seat' tension bleeds through; it's just too bad that, once again, these highlights are often marred by irritating computer graphics. The "Things" themselves are also shown in too great of detail and are far more physically active than what was seen in '82. The old adage is right – less is more – and it would have been to this film's benefit if they heeded that wise saying and kept the creatures out of the immediate forefront.

The film's shining moment is the end (which we won't spoil, but fans of the Carpenter version will get a kick out of it). Overall, 2011's *The Thing* isn't a bad stand-alone film but, when compared to what came before, it's sorely lacking the extra 'oomph' that could have pushed it above being a footnote in Hollywood's long shambling line of remakes, sequels and prequels.

--- Reviewed by Stan Fuller

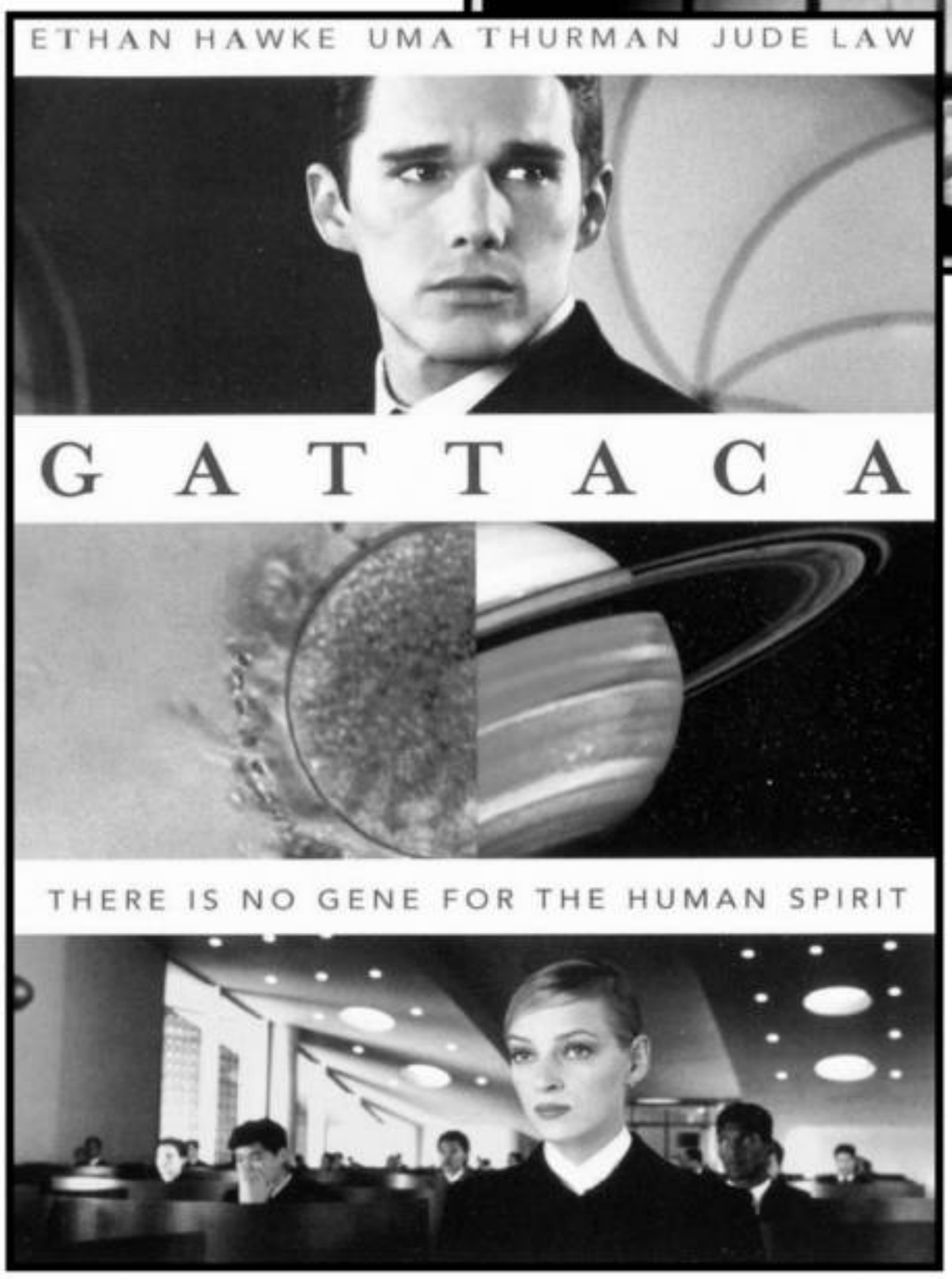
Mary Elizabeth Winstead heats 'things' up in 2011's *The Thing*.

GATTACA

Columbia Pictures; 1997, Running Time: 106 Min., Dir: Andrew Niccol, Writer: Andrew Niccol; Cast: Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, Jude Law.

FUTURE IMPERFECT

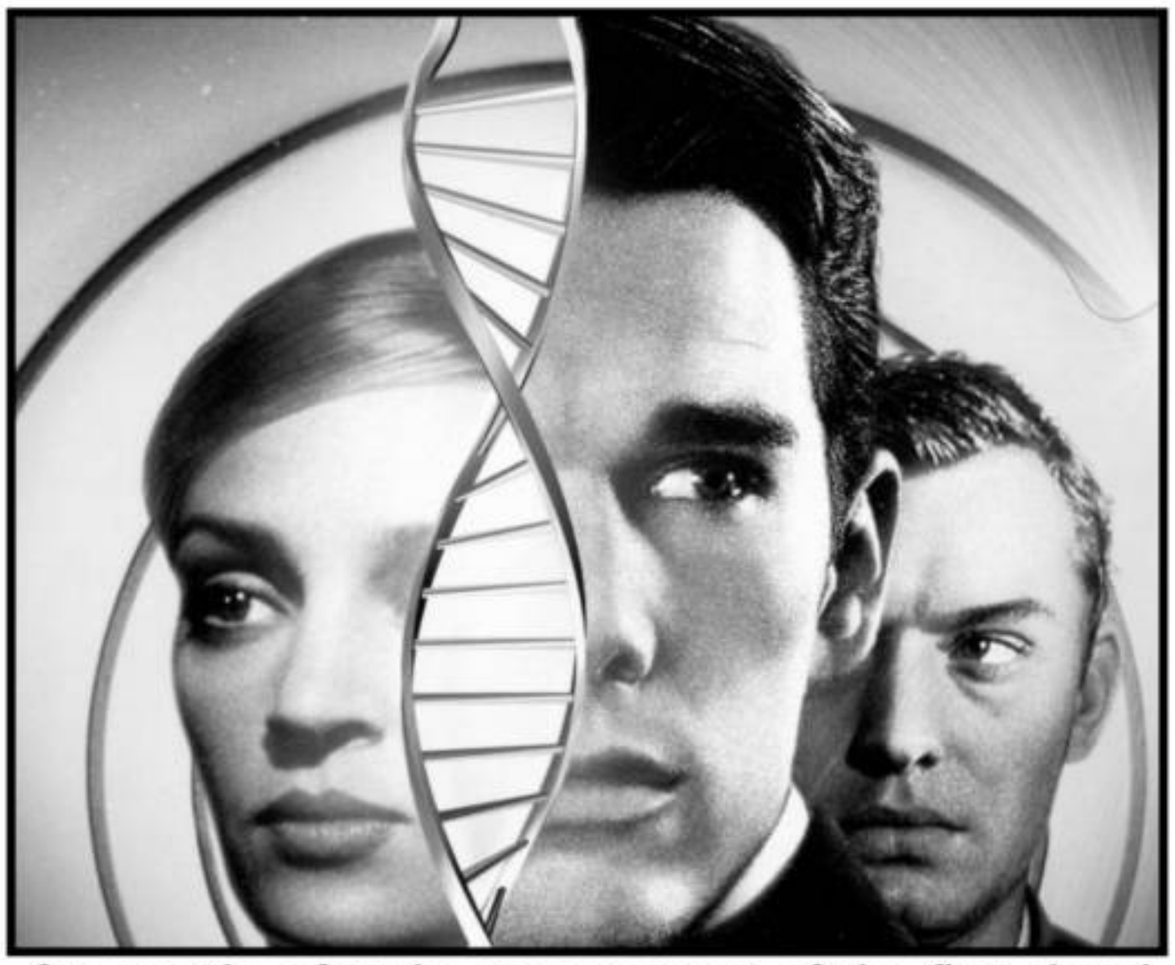
Andrew Niccol, the New Zealand director, carries us into the not-too-distant future with his first feature film in which genetic manipulation of the embryo is accepted worldwide, and parents can choose to "improve" their own descendants' genomes. Society is divided into "valids", the ones that have been artificially conceived, with manipulated and improved genomes, and "in-valids", conceived in a natural way. And although discrimination is illegal, in fact the "in-valids" are constrained to humble jobs.



The "in-valid" Vincent Freeman (Ethan Hawke) – the name itself means free winner – was diagnosed at birth with many defects and pathologies that he will eventually develop during his life time: myopia, emotional problems, and a heart condition that will enable him to live no more than thirty years. His younger brother Anton (Lauren Dean), artificially conceived, is positively perfect. Vincent grows up healthy, dreaming of becoming a space traveler and working at Gattaca Corporation. But how can Vincent obviate the genetic controls and prejudices to become an astronaut? The only possible way to fulfill his dream is to use a "valid" identity with a superior genetic profile. Jerome Morrow (Jude Law), a former "valid" swimming champion, now paraplegic because of a bad accident, sells Vincent his "genetic material": urine, blood, hair, etc., to pass all the genetic tests and to be hired at Gattaca. Vincent excels in his job, and is chosen for a one year mission to Titan, one of Saturn's satellites.

But a week before departure a Gattaca director is murdered and, as the investigation – directed by Anton, Vincent's brother who has become a policeman, and detective Hugo (Alan Arkin) – proceeds, one strand of Vincent's hair is found. It's then open season for the impostor "in-valid", who everybody thinks is also the murderer. Vincent manages to avoid detection as he gets sentimentally involved with Irene (Uma Thurman) – her name means peace – who is forbidden to space travel because of a slight heart condition. With Irene's help Vincent manages to remain unmasked and the real murderer is finally incriminated. Vincent can now fly to Titan but Anton, who has identified his own brother, wants to destroy Vincent's career. The two brothers challenge each other, as they used to do during their childhood, in a swimming competition and Vincent wins the race. Anton then lets Vincent live his life. On the day of the departure, unexpectedly Vincent has to pass the last control and Gattaca's doctor figures out Vincent's real identity, but lets him leave anyway, and erases the results. The doctor probably always knew Vincent's secret, but covered for him because he has a son, who is also an "invalid". Vincent leaves for his trip to Titan as Jerome decides to end his own life after having left enough blood and urine to last Vincent's whole lifetime.

The movie was produced as the scientific community was mapping the entire human genome, and was released a



few months after the announcement of the first cloned sheep's birth, Dolly. *Gattaca* inquires about many burning and alarming issues, many of which have still not been resolved: Do our genes decide our lives? What is the importance of the genetic code on our destiny? What is the meaning of DNA manipulation? Is it right to manipulate DNA? Can we, or should we, interfere with nature? And if we do decide to interfere with the genetic code of our descendants what will be the consequences? How can we decide the "right" embryo to manipulate and eventually improve? And is it enough to have perfect DNA to be perfect? To be happy? And what is perfection?

While the movie was released 15 years ago, we still don't have straight answers to these questions. The movie can be "read" in many ways, besides the science fiction setting that was necessary for the story Niccol wanted to tell.

The "valids" and "in-valids" sadly remind us of racial discrimination, and the race superiority theories that look for objective and scientific foundations such as skull circumference, or height to justify themselves: contentious theories – that luckily have been abandoned today. In the future a DNA manipulation consequence could be a kind of racism by scientific communities recognized as true around the world. For the less gifted people life will then be very difficult in such an environment.

Who will make the decision to manipulate an embryo's DNA? The movie seems to give a straight answer to this question: the parents. It's free choice. The natural fertilized embryos that weren't manipulated will be discarded because "they are not children." The doctor tells Vincent's parents to improve one of the four embryos that will become Anton. But many questions can arise: How much will the manipulation cost? Will only wealthy people be able to access it? What will future society become? Will only rich people have more gifted children, more intelligent descendants? Will the political and economic power then be only in rich people's hands?

Are men promoters of their own destiny? Or does what is written in our genetic code decide all our choices? In the *Gattaca* world everyone, but Vincent, Jerome and finally Irene, seem to think that genes are the only important factor for the individual's success. It is enough to give a baby the right genetic qualities to turn it into a "winning" individual. The vision is very deterministic. But it does reopen an interesting debate on the importance of education and social environment on human's choices and behavior.

Does genetic perfection guarantee happiness? And what is happiness after all? The characters in the movie don't seem happy. The world Niccol shows us is populated by beautiful people that hardly smile and hardly touch each other. Human contact is cold and formal. Only Irene smiles at Vincent and lets herself go after she understands that he's not interested in her genetic code, with which she herself is dissatisfied.

Vincent has a dream: to fly into space. His dream seems impossible since he was born "inferior" because everyone is convinced that genes are responsible for success, because nobody cares to evaluate qualities that science can't measure such as the willingness to sacrifice and to believe in dreams, will power, and the deep desire for "becoming better" that allows one person to surpass himself and reach unhoped-for dreams. Nevertheless the "in-valid" Vincent, despite his perfect brother, and the society he lives in, manages to become an astronaut. A dialogue at the end of the movie may summarize the screenwriter's thoughts. Vincent leaves for Titan the following morning and says good-by to Jerome, imparting a "Thank you." Jerome answers: "I just gave to you my body, you gave me your dream."

If we are born perfect, programmed to succeed in everything we want to accomplish, why should we dream? I think this is the most interesting question Niccol asks the audience: why should we "keep" the imperfect man? Why save him even if he's limited? Jerome, the failed perfect one, who was genetically programmed to realize the maximum in sports, and Vincent, the imperfect one who surpasses himself, gives us the answer: because he can dream. Aren't our dreams, and our will to fulfill them, what makes us different from any other living creature on our planet? If we eliminate our defects, we might become perfect (assuming that we'll know what perfection means sometime in the future) but we'll also erase a part of our deepest humanity…to become what? The discussion is still open.

The original music score, written and directed by the English composer Michael Nyman, is really beautiful. The musician comprehended the movie's deep thematic content and gives the images special insight. We also want to mention production designer Jan Roelfs, who won an Oscar nomination.

If you would like more information and debate on the issues that arise in the movie I advise you to read a very interesting nonfiction book about the problems genetic manipulation can bring us, and its consequences on our present and future life: "Our Posthuman Future" by Francis Fukuyama.

--- Reviewed by Claudia Marinelli

MISSION CANCELLED: *Variety* announced in 2009 that a *Gattaca* television series was in the works. The project has since been shelved.

THE HOUSE WHERE EVIL DWELLS

MGM/UA & Toei Company; 1982, Running Time: 88 Min., Dir: Kevin Connor, Writer: Robert A. Suhosky; Cast: Edward Albert, Susan George, Doug McClure.

SAMURAI, SWORDS & SPIRITS

Twenty years before *Ju-On: The Grudge* or the American remake hit theaters, *The House Where Evil Dwells* gave Western audiences a taste of horror from the Land of the Rising Sun. Directed by Kevin Connor, the man responsible for directing *From Beyond the Grave* (1974), *At the Earth's Core* (1976), and the unforgettable *Motel Hell* (1980), delivers a somewhat tamer tale here, but succeeds in adding his brand of distinctive flare all the same. A co-production between MGM/UA and Toei, this 1982 film kicks off with a prologue circa 1840, where a samurai returns home to find his adulterous wife and her lover in the midst of "shaming his honor," for lack of a better term. Infuriated, the samurai brutally slays them before taking his own life by way of seppuku.

Fast forward over a century later and an American family is taking up residence in the ill-fated house where the massacre took place. Ted, played by Edward Albert (*Mimic 2*), his beautiful wife Laura, in a role carried by Susan George (*Straw Dogs*), and their young daughter are all but elated over their new Japanese home in quiet Kyoto. Alas, it is only a fleeting calm before the storm; the spirits of the dead are restless and strange occurrences begin to manifest within the house. Objects are moved of their own volition, decorative samurai swords fly off the wall, and the neighboring Shinto priest's warning of "a curse" goes unheeded.

It turns out that the spirits are hell-bent on causing Ted and Laura to reenact the gruesome event that transpired in the house more than a century ago. This is a refreshing alternative to the formulaic '80s haunting seen in *The Changeling* (1980) *Poltergeist* (1982), and *House* (1986). The American couple soon find themselves undergoing radical personality shifts; Ted adopts an irritable disposition, becoming short tempered for no apparent reason, while Laura turns a lustful eye towards Alex, a family friend played by Doug McClure (*Maverick*).

Shades of *The Amityville Horror* (1979) are noticeable when the resident

Shinto priest arrives to cleanse the house of evil. The film infuses an Eastern vibe to offset the standard Americanized ghost story conventions. For one, the ghosts are often seen as full bodied apparitions, as opposed to the near-demonic specters depicted in *The Fog* (1980) or a formless manifestation as with *The Entity* (1981). The spirits of the samurai, his wife and her lover possess individuals by walking 'into' them, another divergence from the ghost story tropes of Western origin. On the

down side, a scene where a spectral face materializes in a bowl of soup, triggering the couple's daughter to cry, "There's an awful face in my soup!" probably could have been handled better to avoid a few unwanted laughs from the audience.

The most bizarre scene comes near the end of the film, involving a horde of giant Japanese-mumbling crabs that not only infiltrate the house, but have an uncanny ability to climb trees! On that note, if you're looking for a different breed of ghost tale that doesn't take itself too seriously, look no further than *The House Where Evil Dwells*. You'll enjoy your stay.

--- Reviewed by Jonathan Singer

UNFACEBOOK

Jaws Entertainment; 2011, Running Time: 75 Min., Dir: Stefano Simone, Writers: Dargys Ciberio, Pia Conoscitore, Antonio Universi; Cast: Paolo Carati, Giuseppe La Torre, Tonino Pesante.

HORROR GOES ONLINE

The recent appearance of social networks, instantly liked by the public worldwide, gave us reason to wonder about their impact on our daily lives, especially on the lives of teenagers and young adults. *Unfacebook* is based on Gordiano Lupi's short story entitled "The Priest." It's a disquieting movie that seeks to examine the power of social networks.

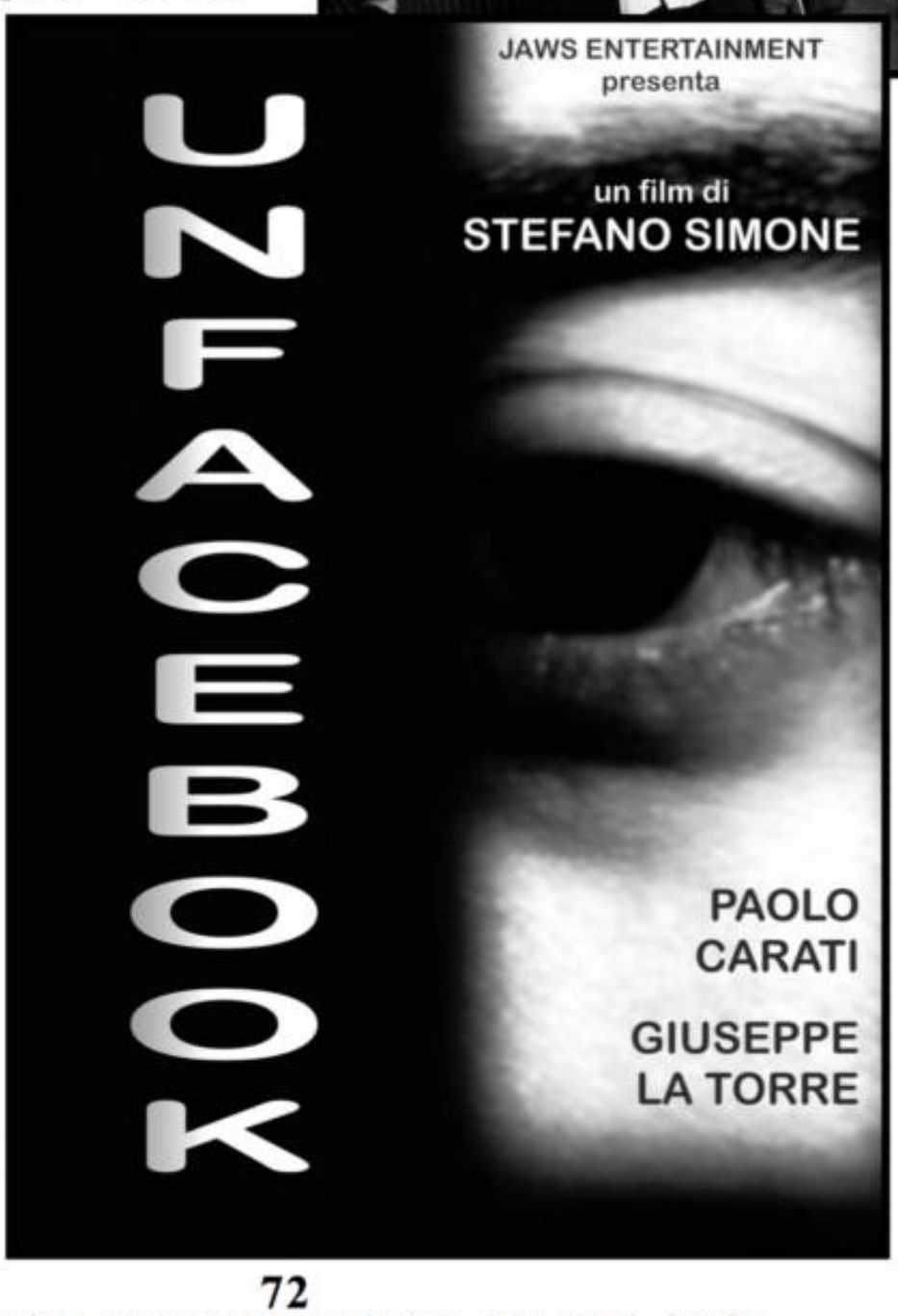
In a small Italian town a young parish priest, who also teaches religion at the town's high school, listens to his parishioners' confessions, and the sins are inexcusable: adultery, pedophilia, and fraud. The priest is faithful to his religious mission, but he's also an educated man interested in computers, psychology and hypnosis. He gets tired and angry as he listens to his parishioners' sins, one day deciding to use his computer and psychological skills to make contact with his sinning parishioners anonymously. He sends them disturbing messages through the computer, that have the power to hypnotize them and take their own free will away. A phone call shortly follows the computer messages. As the priest utters one key word, the sinning parishioners behave as if they were hypnotized and commit suicide. The police start an investigation, but can't find any evidence to connects the suicides to each other.

The priest then decides to use his psychological powers to clean up the little town from common criminals and people he defines as criminals (among them a member of Parliament). He starts a social network called "Unfacebook" and draws teenagers into his net to make them become justice templars through messages that can hypnotize them. The teenagers respond to the stimuli, they become subdued, their will is destroyed and they kill the people the priest decides to punish, upon his command. One of them kills his own father. The police investigate but have no clues, until the umpteenth murder is committed. The Chief of Police finally finds a link between the murders: the victims are free criminals, crooks, drug dealers, pedophiles etc…and somehow all of them have had contact with the priest.

The chief of police queries the priest, but can't find anything to incriminate him. He then decides to go to the parish himself, where he finds a computer. He discovers proof that the priest was behind the murders. He goes back to the police station and starts to work with his own computer, but we can't figure out if he's working to arrest the priest, or if he will leave him free to use the power of the net because, with some flash backs, we discover that the policeman himself was a childhood victim of sexual abuse.

The movie has a blue dinginess that increases the feeling of environmental degradation adding anxiety to the whole story and leaving the audience with a sense of dismay, but in many scenes it doesn't help to fully understand the images.

The bleak music is perfect for the movie; it adds anxiety to the crucial scenes, and a sort of frightening expectancy before every murder. The special effects are functional to the story and very eloquent in helping us understand the situations. The editing is also excellent.



Gordiano Lupi's original story is centered on the main character: the priest who is shown to the reader as rigid, with an orthodox idea of religion, a lonely man who paradoxically is also idealistic and well educated. He studies computers, and has a psychology degree. The short-sighted, bleak provincial life, his parishioners' hypocrisy and their wickedness, turn him into a disappointed and angry man.

He is also disappointed in himself and by his priesthood mission. Reality is hard to

bear, and from "peacemaker" he turns into an executioner, for he can't bear the weaknesses of humanity. He believes he is unfailing and pure, but most of all he forgot that Christ said: "Who never sinned, can throw the first stone." When he makes his first mistake in killing three innocent people, he's very depressed. As he can't accept his own failure, finally the priest kills himself. The character in the written story is very coherent.

In the movie the introductory part that "explains" the priest's personality, the foundation for a coherent unraveling of the story, is almost missed. The audience understands that the priest is tired of listening to the confessions, but we never see him absolve the parishioners, and we can just imagine that he's stressed. He buys psychology and hypnosis magazines, but we have no clue that helps us believe he's a skilled psychologist as well as a skilled computer programmer. When his messages reach the parishioners, the motives for such terrible suicides are too weak. We are also not convinced by the teenagers' behavior, whose free will is completely crushed by simple computer messages.

The movie seeks to investigate the importance of social networks on teenagers' lives, and of the dangers of misusing the net. As a secondary theme the movie seeks to have us think about the free criminals that are never punished, even though they might have carried out terrible crimes.

The priest-executioner links the two themes. But the connection in between events is not convincing. Hypnosis is used to justify the suicides and the teenagers' behavior, but this is really too simple because hypnosis doesn't take away the individual's free will, and doesn't take away memory. On the contrary it's used as a form of therapy to cause people to remember and overcome their hidden traumas.

The screenwriters might have been better off investigating subliminal messages, or other methods to crush the will of teenagers and thus the reasons for their mental fragility. Movies don't have to be "real" but they have to be plausible, in order to make the audience identify with the characters. It's too easy for the main character, the priest, to manipulate minds – so easy that we can't believe him, and consequently we can't believe the story. A fantastic element could have been added to the story to justify the priest's powers, but the movie has no fantastic elements.

In Gordiano Lupi's story there is the description of the suicides and the murders, but with less details, and the passages are readable. In the movie the scenes are very raw, and the murders are graphically shown. Isn't the world of movies magic because of its great suggestive power? Why use raw and bare violence? It is true that many well-known movie directors use violence, but did we ever ask ourselves why? Is it right to use violence so easily? Is it useful to the movie itself? In this particular movie the answer would be "no." The director and the screenwriters could have told us the same story without any obvious violence, and we could just wonder about their choices. There is an audience that likes violence, and many violent movies are successful, as well as many violent TV programs. It brings money in. But is it beautiful? Is it necessary?

I don't think so.

Cinema is an art and art should respect some laws of "beauty." Somebody will object that whatever we like is what is beautiful, but I really don't believe that watching somebody cutting his own genitals out is nice to see. It's anguished, depressing, but most of all, useless.

The young director, Stefano Simone, just turned 26, but he seems to be able to use the camera. He is never sloppy, nor superficial. The director has a responsibility to decide how to tell a story. I think Stefano Simone has clear ideas on how to tell a story: the tight shots, the close-ups, the characters' moves and the right angles which all give the movie the right thrill. We can only wish that in time, as Stefano directs other movies, he grows and becomes a well-known name in the Italian movie landscape.

--- Reviewed by Claudia Marinelli

THE WHISPERER IN DARKNESS

Fungi; 2011, Running Time: 104 Min., Dir: Sean Branney, Writers: Andrew Leman, Sean Branney; Cast: Matt Foyer, Barry Lynch, and Matt Lagan.

A TALE WORTHY OF THE GREAT OLD ONES

Following in the footsteps of 2005's *The Call of Cthulu*, the H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society has put together an impressive film adaptation of Lovecraft's *The Whisperer in Darkness*. While *The Call of Cthulu* was made in the style of an early 1920s silent film, *Whisperer* invokes the atmosphere of a '30s Universal horror picture. The plot of the film centers on a skeptical professor who travels to Vermont to uncover the truth behind sightings of strange creatures. In short, the production values of *Whisperer* are phenomenal, coupled with wonderful actors, and a gripping – even creepy – story. Up-and-coming filmmakers could learn a lesson or two from the talented crew behind this flick. The only complaint is that the third act of *Whisperer* falters somewhat, but not enough to cripple the experience. The two-disc DVD set comes with some great special features that will keep you occupied for quite a while! A must-see for any Lovecraft fan!

--- Reviewed by Tai Ng

ANIME:

DANCE IN THE VAMPIRE BUND

Vampire Bund Gyouseifu; 2010, 12 Episodes. Based on a manga by Nozomu Tamaki; Dir: Akiyuki Shinbo; Cast: Shizuka Ito, Yuichi Nakamara, Chiwa Saito.

BUND GIRL

From the standout first episode, you know you're watching something different. *Dance in the Vampire Bund* shows us a world where vampires step out of the shadows with the wish to establish a home for themselves, the titular bund, and all the forces working against them. Upon this backdrop we follow the lives of Mina Tepes, the ruler of the vampires and Akira Kaburagi, one of her protectors.

In an atypical move, *Dance in the Vampire Bund* spends much of its first episode using a different narrative style to the remaining series, framing the episode's events as a live TV broadcast of a celebrity panel program deciding on whether or not vampires are real, after a woman is attacked and bitten by her assailant, who destroyed the scene as he fled. This of course is largely an engineered stunt to allow Mina Tepes, who has the appearance of a young girl, to reveal the reality of vampires to the world and that she is their ruler.

Akira, the male lead is barely in the first episode, but becomes the viewpoint character for the rest of the series as it returns to a more traditional story format. Akira at first doesn't remember Mina at all after suffering a head injury

a year before the events of the story, but upon meeting her again and having to save her life, the memories start to come back and he discovers that he is something other than human himself. We follow Akira as he takes up his role as sworn guardian of Mina with forays into his school life.

The overarching nature of the plot is surprisingly political, with how the vampires go about establishing the bund and the internal politics of the vampire clans that are sworn to serve Mina, but still vie for power. There are also a variety of forces at work trying to stop the bund from happening or destroying it completely, including both groups of humans and vampires and one organization formed of both, all running their own schemes. A recurring feature of the story, and often the main focus of character development, is the subject of promises and of keeping them. The main promise is Akira's to Mina, to always protect her, but as the story swirls along we find that a lot of the motivations of other characters are also based around promises they are trying to keep.

Yuki Saegusa, a school friend of Akira, is the main human in the story and leads the peripheral cast made up of other school based characters, along with Mina's principle protectors and an assortment of antagonists.

The series' animation is excellent, with lush colors and fine details. The initial two episodes look a little different however, the first because it is largely portrayed as a TV broadcast and the second in which a lot of things appear to have thin blue outlines, for no discernible reason whatsoever. The dub is pleasant, as is the music, and there's a standout performance from Monica Rial who voices Mina, managing to make it believable that this little girl has lived a very long time and is the absolute ruler of the vampire race.

No review of this series would be complete without mentioning the unsettling content that is likely to make this series somewhat notorious. There is an amount of standard fan service, but it's never lingering or the series' focus and that's fine, but there's also bits and pieces of full on nudity, the problem here being that it's Mina, and it's not all Barbie doll style. In a way it actually works because it's either innocent or actually meant to be disconcerting,

especially if Akira is around. The real problem for people will arise from a particular scene in the second episode where Mina needs her skin recovered in the gel that stops her from burning up in the sun and for some reason she can't do it herself…

In the best traditions of 'if you don't actually show it, it's worse', there are two further scenes that make for particularly uncomfortable viewing given what they imply is going on rather than actually show. One deals with a new vampire being created and another a 'purity' exam, which is almost certainly exactly what you're imagining.

Whilst potentially off putting, it must be made clear that all such scenes have a direct impact on the story and character development and actually work well from a story perspective. The actual horror aspects of the series, in its bloody action sequences (very nicely choreographed too) somewhat pale in comparison, but it rather depends on what unsettles you more.

The DVD extras are the usual textless opening/closing but with some nice additions. There is a promo video as well as a number of the original Japanese adverts for the series. The most interesting extra is the 'intermissions', these are essentially motion comics, where we are treated to what appears to be panels from the manga (in Japanese and I don't own the manga so can't be certain) with the words spoken by the voice actors (in Japanese with English subs). The really fun thing is that these take place between the episodes and actually fill in gaps and provide a little more depth to various characters, at least one gives away a fairly major plot point, so I wouldn't suggest watching them until after the series. Between the actual episodes instead of previews we have 'Dance with the Vampire Maids', humorous shorts with chibi-fied characters.

In total, the series is really quite excellent, and well worth a viewing, so long as you're not easily off put by what some may consider the odd piece of objectionable content.

--- Reviewed by Jon Hudson

Further Reading To Sink Your Teeth Into!

Dance in the Vampire Bund **was based on a manga series written by Nozomu Tamaki. The manga, which started in 2006, is still ongoing and has recently surpassed 13 collected volumes.**

TRANSFORMERS: THE HEADMASTERS

Toei Animation; 1987, 35 Episodes. Dir: Katsutoshi Nakano & Shoji Tajima. Cast: Tomiko Suzuki, Kazue Komiya, Hideyuki Hori.

HEAD ON!

In the world of animation, few properties have the staying power of *Transformers*. For the last three decades the franchise has spawned a number of iterations that have graced the airwaves in one form or another (not to mention a toy industry unto itself and three box-office smashing films). It all began in 1984 when the *Transformers* aired on U.S. television and captured the hearts and minds of kids everywhere. The series lasted four seasons and a spectacular animated film that, for many, is the benchmark milestone of the entire property. Though the final season of *Transformers* only consisted of three episodes, it made an attempt to wrap up the series for American audiences, much in the same way that the animated *G.I. Joe* (1987) movie provided closure to the series.

While the *Transformers*' television ratings and toyline may have been starting to fall short in the U.S., Japanese viewers wanted more. And thus the *Headmasters* were born, the first of several animated *Transformers* shows to be produced exclusively for Japanese television. Discarding the three episode conclusion that made up the fourth season, the new series titled *Transformers: The Headmasters* focused on the further conflicts between the evil Decepticons and the heroic Autobots. Joining the ongoing war are the Headmasters – Transformers that can detach their heads to form miniature robots and convert their bodies into vehicles.

Fans of the original *Transformers* cartoon will be thrilled at seeing 'Generation 1' favorites return to the small screen, including Optimus Prime, Ultra Magnus, Soundwave, and Galvatron, among an assortment of newcomers like Fortress Maximus, Scorponok, and Six Shot. While the series never delves into the darker territory of the 1986 animated film, the plotlines in *Headmasters* do offer a sense of 'higher stakes' than the initial series. In the

original show, no matter how much punishment either the Autobots or Decepticons doled out to each other, there were never really any casualties (and if there were, the characters would often return in a future episode). That's not the case in *Headmasters*. In actuality, *Headmasters* is somewhat brutal in its manner of killing off characters. Within the first three episodes, several major characters meet their end. This continues in an effort to phase out many older Transformers with new ones, not unlike the '86 movie.

In the 1990s an English dubbed version of *Headmasters* aired in Asia – which would go on to be known as the "Singapore dub," a cringe-worthy translation that was notorious for both mixing up characters' names and having some of the oddest dialogue in *Transformer* history (though some may say that worst dialogue still rests with the Michael Bay films). *Headmasters* was finally given its official North American DVD release thanks to Shout! Factory. These DVDs are worth checking out, though don't expect any substantial extras save for an art gallery. Even so, Shout! Factory's release gives viewers a well done subtitle track with the original Japanese audio. The much maligned English dub is not included, and may very well be for the best – even so, it would have been a nice addition just for reference.

Overall, *Headmasters* is a worthwhile entry in the *Transformers* legacy and certainly truer in spirit to the initial series than what *Beast Wars* gave viewers in the mid '90s. Fans hungry for the cel-shaded glory of the robots in disguise will find that *Headmasters* is a must see – and thankfully, the two Japanese follow-ups, *Masterforce* and *Victory* are finding their way onto DVD as well, thanks to the efforts of Shout! Factory.

---Reviewed by Lisa Stilts

VIDEO GAMES

ALIENS: INFESTATION

Sega; 2011, WayForward Technologies/Gearbox Software; Platform: Nintendo DS

GAME OVER, MAN! XENOMORPHS INFEST YOUR NINTENDO DS

We first learnt of *Aliens: Infestation's* existence in May 2009 when gameplay footage was leaked online. Back then it was simply titled *Aliens: Colonial Marines DS*. Fast-forward to September 2011 and the now titled *Aliens: Infestation* is released. Developed by WayForward and published by Sega, *Infestation* is the last "*Aliens*" only title to be released for a portable console since *Aliens: Thanatos Encounter* for the Nintendo GameBoy Color in 2001.

As always, I approach these games as a casual gamer and as an *Aliens* fan. So when others looked at *Infestation* and saw *Contra* or *Metroid*, I saw the old Mega Drive on SNES *Alien 3*. So when reading this review please remember it's from the point of view of someone who only picks up these consoles to play the few games that interest him, not as a hardcore gamer.

Aliens: Infestation is set just after *Aliens* and *Alien 3* and is intended as a companion game to *Colonial Marines*. Sega and Gearbox approached WayForward for the project and according to an interview with WayForward, Gearbox did play a close role in ensuring that continuity matched between this and *Colonial Marines*. However, until *Colonial Marines* is released we won't be able to see just how well these two games work as companion pieces.

From loading the game up I was excited to see another new *Aliens* game. The introduction menu was simple and looked very *Alien* and the music was good.

Throughout the game we play as one squad of marines of many from the Sephora that is investigating the Sulaco. A lot of the game's story revolves around the Sulaco which is easily the largest location in the game. We open on the ship where we proceed to unlock around 30 percent of the warship until we're whisked away to the surface of LV-426 and thrown into a corporate conspiracy.

Infestation doesn't break the mold as far as *Aliens* stories are concerned. It revolves around Weyland-Yutani's desire to keep the Aliens for their own bio-weapons division which is, as most *Aliens* fans will know, pretty standard fare. *Infestation* does introduce the gaming community to the Union of Progressive People.

The UPP were a communist rival to the Company first introduced in the very first unused script for *Alien 3* written by William Gibson. They added a human element to the game to help vary the enemies you encounter. I was really happy with their inclusion as it really went to show that WayForward had looked deeper into the *Aliens* universe than just the movies.

We also play through a UPP facility on the surface of LV-426 as well as a very brief boss section aboard the derelict ship and the Phobos Station, a research station on one of the moons of Mars. Otherwise, the majority of the gameplay takes place aboard the Sulaco.

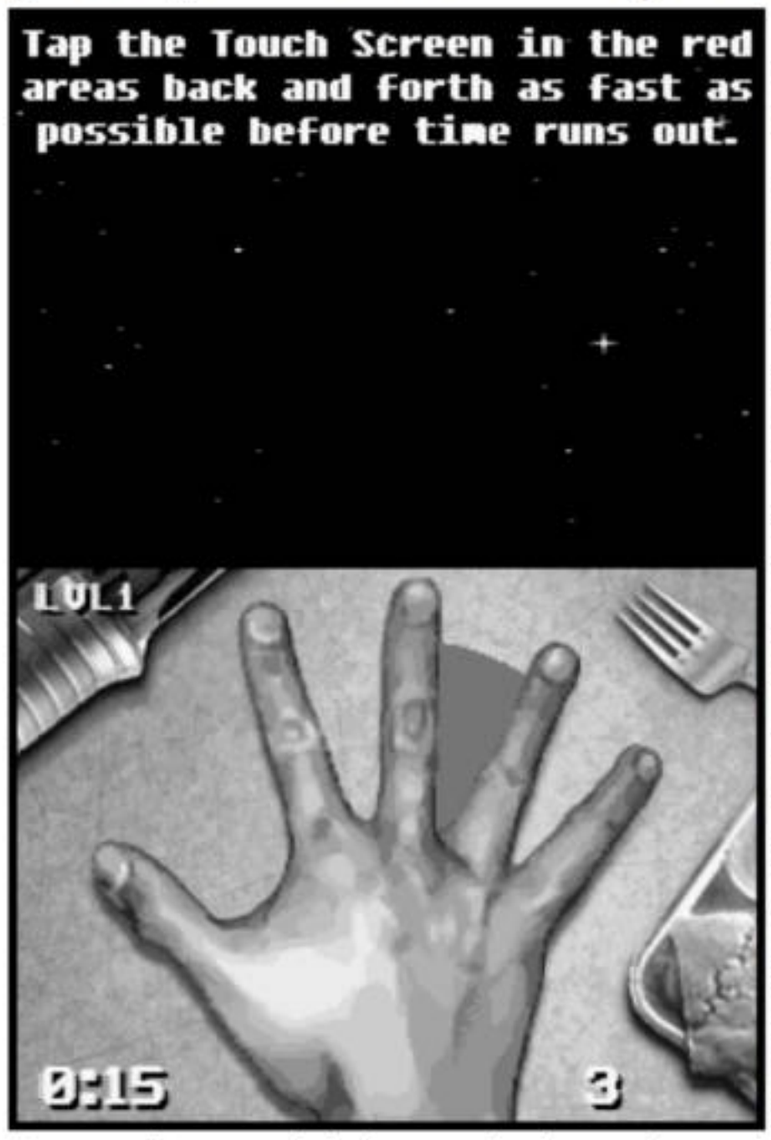
It is disappointing that there are so few locations in the game (the section aboard the derelict is literally only just the boss fight) but thankfully the Sulaco is fully mapped out. You explore from stem to stern, through the Alien infected airducts, to the very exterior of the ship. It makes me wonder if WayForward also worked with Syd Mead to flesh out the design of the ship.

I loved the EVA section and everything leading up to it. You are walking along the very interior of those antenna at the front of the ship, as you approach the airlock, an Alien drops down from the ceiling and takes out a nearby NPC marine. Infestation is chockablock full of cool little moments like this. You don your suit (looks just like a sprite version of the suits from *Alien*) and off you go on the outside.

Infestation is a side scrolling action game, very similar in appearance to the old *Alien 3* tie-ins on the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo. It gave *Infestation* a very nice retro feeling. The environments and sprites are very nicely detailed and everything looked as if it'd fit well within the *Aliens* universe, just in portable form. The animations are all pretty smooth as well. It was a very nice game to look at.

The gameplay is split between the two screens, the main action taking place on the top and the bottom touch-screen playing a supporting role. You view your map, control your inventory and etc, through the touch screen. I was very thankful that it wasn't used too much as I liked the simplistic nature of it. I lost my stencil enough times without having to use the touch screen for do or die controls.

That said, for you DS fans the touch-screen isn't abandoned altogether. There is a segment where you drive an APC which requires you to use the bottom screen to control the turrets and destroy the hordes of Aliens. And a nice surprise was that you could unlock a mini game called "Knife Trick." As the name implies, it's based off Bishop's trick where you have to use your stencil to stab around the graphic of a hand on the touch screen. You hit the hand and the game is over. It's a fun little game that brought a big grin to my face when I loaded it up the first time.



The bottom screen also houses the map and motion tracker displays which I found to have both its advantages and disadvantages. The map can be an absolute charm when you're playing through the huge Sulaco. It is a very helpful tool for navigating and is helped further along by the flare feature. If you come to a point of interest you want to return to, you drop a flare and it is marked on the map which I found to be another good nod to the franchise.

On the down side, once you pick up the motion tracker to go along with the map the game soon loses some of its tension. Early on in the game when I was without either, I found out the hard way that you don't go charging through the rooms because you'll find yourself surprised by the Aliens.

Once you've got the tracker and the map it shows you exactly in the room where the enemy is so you can simply pull your trigger and start walking forward, that Alien will be dead almost as soon as it appears.

And the spawn points always stay the same which made the later sections of returning back to the Sulaco very mundane, especially when playing through areas you already had. It would have worked better if the Aliens had some sort of randomized spawning so to keep you on your toes.

Or perhaps another suggestion would have been if the tracker had been inaccurate as it was in the older games. It would have kept the tension going. That said, there was a couple of "oh snap" moments where you thought you'd be fighting a bad guy but a cat jumps out at you, but thankfully it isn't over-used.

The Aliens tend to appear from the floor or from the ceiling but there were several moments in the game where they appeared out of piping in the wall or from the Hived-up walls. I'd just like to comment again on the graphics and how detailed the sprites look. Those moments really impressed me.

As I mentioned before, there are several enemies other than just the Aliens to face. You fight against UPP soldiers as well as UPP combat droids (which look like your typical robots so WayForward didn't rock the boat in that design) and at some point you fight Weyland-Yutani… somethings. I think they were supposed to be synthetics from the white blood but they didn't do much. I was punched by one once but other than that they weren't a problem.

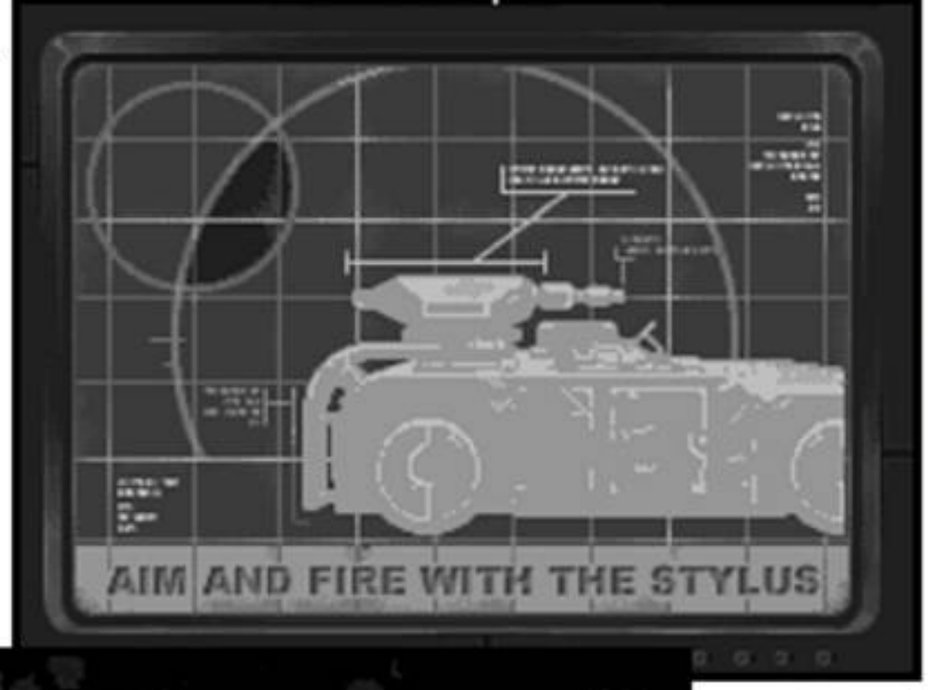
All your typical Aliens are there from the egg to the Queen but the Phobos mission also introduced a different variant in the way of Gorilla Aliens which were a lot faster than the others. Their introduction had me on my toes.

You also face five bosses throughout the course of the game. You fight three different Queens on the Sulaco, a Jockey-Alien on LV-426 and another hybrid on Phobos which was either a larger Gorilla hybrid or I've seen it referred to as the Rhino Alien. For the most part these bosses demand you sacrifice at least one marine to them as they require a fair amount of punishment which involves you constantly attacking a specific part of their bodies.

However, two of the bosses do require something a little more interesting. The second boss fight aboard the Sulaco involves you having to injure the Queen and then activate several terminals in the airlock to jettison the Queen into space. It was another fan service moment but it worked. Once I figured out what it was going to be, I had another one of those smiles on my face as I set about channeling Ripley.

Infestation features all your typical Colonial Marine equipment in the way of the M41A, the VP70, shotgun, flamethrower and smartgun. These weapons can be upgraded (improved damage and range) by finding upgrade boxes scattered throughout the game but you can only upgrade each weapon three times. I am starting to become disappointed at the lack of new weapons, however, as recently it looks like all *Alien* related games aren't expanding with new designs.

Like I mentioned before, you also find a motion tracker, a map, several variants of explosives (demolition charges, typical grenades and pulse rifle grenades) and the cool flare feature. Oh, and the torches and welder. Initially much of the Sulaco is blocked off by locked doors or dark areas that prevent you from progressing. Once you recover these items you can move further into the ship. It was a very nice way of structuring the Sulaco for progression later on.



One of the features that WayForward was really pushing was the squad feature, which essentially acted as your lives. Throughout the game there are 19 playable marine characters for you to find and recruit into your squad. Your squad consists of a "point man" which is the marine you play with, plus three additional reinforcements.

If you have a full squad you can't recruit these marines so it's best to mark their position with a flare and return to them if you lose a squad member. All the marines have their own personalities which is shown through the story slides in the game and their little quirky animations when you enter the communication room, which is basically your save room.

This is the main replay draw of the game, the ability to have the story told 19 different ways – as long as you keep your point man alive. If not, then you shift to another marine and a different personality. The thinking behind this is also attachment to the characters

you're playing. I can't say this particularly worked for me during my first play through as, like I said, the bosses seemed to demand I sacrifice at least one marine to them so I was often swapping to a new character.

However, I do intend to replay and try and keep my point man alive so I can experience this feature as intended by WayForward. Which brings us onto another feature of *Infestation* that was heavily talked about: captured marines. If your marine is killed during the main sections of the levels then they will actually be captured by the Aliens and taken to their hive.

At that point you have three minutes to get to them and save them. This is a cool feature but the problem is they're usually taken to the other side of the map that has you fighting your way back through the map.

The game respawns all the enemies you have killed when you move through a new section, resulting in a reloading of the section so you will find yourself continually fighting through the same locations and same enemy placements when you're backtracking or rescuing your captured marines.

I must be honest in that this inconvenience had me just abandoning people as I wanted to progress through the game and not have to go back on myself. Bad gaming on my part? Yeah, quite probably, but I tend to find people get frustrated having to backtrack on themselves too often.

If you get there in time, the marine returns to your squad. If you're slightly late he returns to your squad but will eventually give birth a few minutes later on. And if you're completely off the mark then it's "game over, man. Game over!"

When killed during boss fights or by humans, that marine is simply lost to the great beyond.

I think my biggest gripe with the game has to be just how short it is. It took me around a day and a half to complete the game. And that was with me having an afternoon away from the DS. From the sounds of it, this is the typical length of a shooter/action game for the DS so I can't help but feel sorry for those DS gamers that prefer the genre – but that sounds like a problem with the platform and the genre on the whole.

I honestly enjoyed *Infestation* a great deal but I feel that it would have benefited from several additional locations. Or even having another larger location like the Sulaco. But as I mentioned above, I do intend to go back to try and experience the game through the various personalities, so that replay incentive is there.

Whether this is a good enough incentive for everyone, I can't say. And this complaint is a result of really enjoying the experience of playing *Aliens: Infestation*. I could have happily gone on for several more levels.

Everything looked and felt right and it was fantastic seeing the Union of Progressive People. The majority of my complaints are small but the extremely disappointingly short playtime really brings it down for me. All the small things are there, it feels like a part of the *Aliens* universe, the love is there from WayForward and the sprites are wonderfully detailed. I award *Aliens: Infestation* with a 3.5 out of 5.

--- Reviewed by Aaron Percival

CORPSE PARTY

Xseed Games; 2011, Team GrisGris; Platform: PlayStation Portable

THIS PARTY IS V.I.P. – 'VICTIMS IN PERIL'

Sony's PlayStation Portable may be well into its final days but that doesn't mean there isn't some life left in the good ol' PSP. Ironically, it's death – not life – that's at the forefront of *Corpse Party*, a horror adventure game that is surprisingly chilling and engaging for a handheld excursion, despite a number of glaring faults. *Corpse Party* originated in Japan back in 1996, developed with the aid of the famed RPG Maker software. It proved successful enough for two remakes to be released – the latest, *Corpse Party: Blood Covered Repeated Fear*, was imported to North America by Xseed Games on November 22nd 2011. The game is available exclusively via download on the PlayStation Network.

Corpse Party tells the story of a group of high school students who, while attempting a seemingly harmless friendship ritual, are transported to a parallel dimension. The classmates soon find out that their former school, Kisaragi Academy, has transformed into the dilapidated confines of Heavenly Host Elementary – a haunted school with a cursed past. Throughout the game your goal is to

lead the students around Heavenly Host without falling victim to the grisly trappings that wait around every corner. Despite the game's employ of retro 16-bit graphics and 2D sprites, *Corpse Party* is able to deliver an overwhelming amount of dread, fear and outright scares to the player; it will be sure to keep you on the edge of your seat, more so than many of the more notable console games (like the recent entries in the *Resident Evil* series, to name names).

Make no mistake, *Corpse Party* is all about story. The game is broken into chapters and by the end of Chapter One you'll already feel a bond to these characters – so much so that you'll be carefully considering your path around the rooms and halls of Heavenly Host, taking every caution to ensure your character makes it to safety. Word of caution, those looking for rampant aspects of actual gameplay should venture elsewhere. Aside from moving your character around with the directional buttons and pushing 'X' to investigate your surroundings, there's not much else that can be done. *Corpse Party* is not an RPG where the player can fight back. Instead, one is just trying to survive, and the limited controls often augment the feeling of futility and desperation as you hazard the dim corridors around you.

Most of *Corpse Party's* story is told through onscreen text and some voice acting. To their credit, Xseed did a fine job of translating the game for English audiences. While the only soundtrack option is for the original Japanese voice acting – a shining example of phenomenal voice work, to be sure – the text screens convey the horrific details of the unfolding events. At times some of the dialogue does seem unfitting for the treacherous situation at hand, but it's not a deal breaker. The sound effects are eerie and effective in sending constant shivers up your spine, just be sure to wear a decent pair of headphones while playing for maximum results and to create an even more immersive experience.

Corpse Party stumbles in the frequent ways your character can die. On one hand, it's interesting to see all the options that can lead to your demise, but it quickly becomes a maddening exercise in frustration – one that almost has you hurling the PSP across the room. In a typical game, you die and can start right back up from a nearby checkpoint. Not so with *Corpse Party*; once you meet your untimely end don't think you can simply return to where you last faltered and pick up there. Instead, you'll often have to retread the same ground you've already covered and, worst yet, manually skip through pages upon pages of text you had read only moments ago. It goes without saying that you'll see Game Over screens very often, since many of the game's sequences rely on you performing a series of actions in precise order, or by either doing or not doing something that may inadvertently lead to your character's death (like looking at a specific note or entering the wrong bathroom stall). Playing without a strategy guide is <u>not</u> recommended.

Despite this, *Corpse Party* has some grand moments. One scene has your character trapped in a school infirmary while being pursued by a shadowy figure. The only exit is a door – it won't open…it's been shut tight, covered by strands of thick black hair. Fortunately, your character had found matches and a bottle of rubbing alcohol a short time ago…only by using these, you can burn the hair away and make your escape. It's times like that when *Corpse Party* becomes a thrilling affair. The death scenes are surprisingly gruesome as well, including one where a possessed character shoves scissors down her throat!

Corpse Party isn't for everyone, but if you're a fan of Japan's brand of the supernatural and America's penchant for gory horror – and you're looking for a reason to fire up that PSP in its twilight years – you might want to give this one a try.

--- Reviewed by Alexander Bochner

COLLECTIBLES

GEARS OF WAR 3 RETRO LANCER REPLICA

Neca Toys; 2011.

WIELD THE PRIDE OF THE COG ARMY!

Gears of War 3 is the "epic" conclusion to the *Gears of War* franchise, and it featured many firsts of the series in the final installment. In addition to new game modes, new maps, new characters and new enemies, *Gears of War 3* also contained new weapons, one of which was the Retro Lancer. The Retro Lancer was actually the old model of the Mk2 Lancer Assault Rifle that is used throughout the entire *Gears of War* series. The Mk1 Lancer Assault Rifle was found to be ineffective against the enemy Locusts following Emergence Day. Thus a new rifle was crafted and issued to all COG soldiers as standard equipment. The Mk1 models weren't used again until many years later when resources had become so scarce that the situation demanded it. The Mk1 Lancer Assault Rifle was reborn the Retro Lancer.

NECA's Retro Lancer replica.

Epic Games announced a promotion in cooperation with Gamestop and NECA last year to create a life-size replica of the Retro Lancer. The replica Retro Lancer was available through preorder with a copy of *Gears of War 3* or as a stand alone item, but limited quantities soon dwindled and the Retro Lancer became a highly sought after collector's item rather quickly. The replica Retro Lancer sold for MSRP value of $99.99 at Gamestop during its launch, but it can most likely only be purchased for a few hundred dollars through online sites such as eBay now.

The replica Retro Lancer is created with the actual 3D model used in Gears of War 3. The attention to detail is apparent in every aspect of the gun, and it features a blood stained bayonet attached under the barrel. The colors of the replica Retro Lancer are deadly accurate, and there are even weathered effects and other battle worn details that reflect the age of the rifle. The replica Retro Lancer is over 3 ½ feet in length to better replicate the feeling of holding a real Retro Lancer. Of course, the rifle doesn't shoot real rounds, but it does make authentic firing sounds taken straight from *Gears of War 3* when you pull the trigger. Basically, this may be a plastic toy, but you'll still feel like a bad ass when you wield this Retro Lancer.

Obviously, this toy is for the hardcore collector or *Gears of War* fan. Holding this bad boy in their hand is probably the closest a *Gears of War* fan can get to the action without actually picking up an Xbox 360 controller. This is a very accurate representation of the Retro Lancer from *Gears of War 3*, and it's sure to make anyone feel like a true COG soldier no matter how old you are.

---Reviewed by Amanda Dyar and Kenny King
(Editors of BioGamer Girl Magazine)

LITERATURE

GHOST INVESTIGATOR #1

A Spirited Comics Publication; 2011, Script: Don Everett Smith Jr., Pencils: Joseph Regis, Inks/Lettering: K.M. Haugen, Cover: Joseph Regis & Bill Anderson.

WHO YA GONNA CALL?

Plagued by a spirit, spook, or specter and the Ghostbusters' phone line is busy? Have no fear, the Ghost Investigator will take the case! As a kid I was an avid reader of *Spider-Man*, *X-Men*, *Superman*, and *Flash* comics, they were fun stories and the characters were always larger than life. Then, one day, my tastes shifted from capes to shrouds when I picked up my first issue of DC's *The House of Mystery*. From that moment on, I was on the prowl for horror comics, leading to the discovery of Warren Publishing's cryptic catalog of *Vampirella*, *Creepy*, and *Eerie*. It proved to be a collector's milestone for me, and I've never looked back since.

Ghost Investigator #1 is a welcome return to the golden heyday of Warren Magazine's horror publications, utilizing the same black-and-white style that once added an undeniable atmosphere unachievable even by color. *Ghost Investigator* makes ample use of its blacks and whites, some pages soaked with darkness, others employing generous usage of negative space. There's even a few noir elements thrown in for good measure. Only

the detailed and busy cover of *Ghost Investigator* is in full vibrant color, and provides a fantastic first-impression of the treasure within.

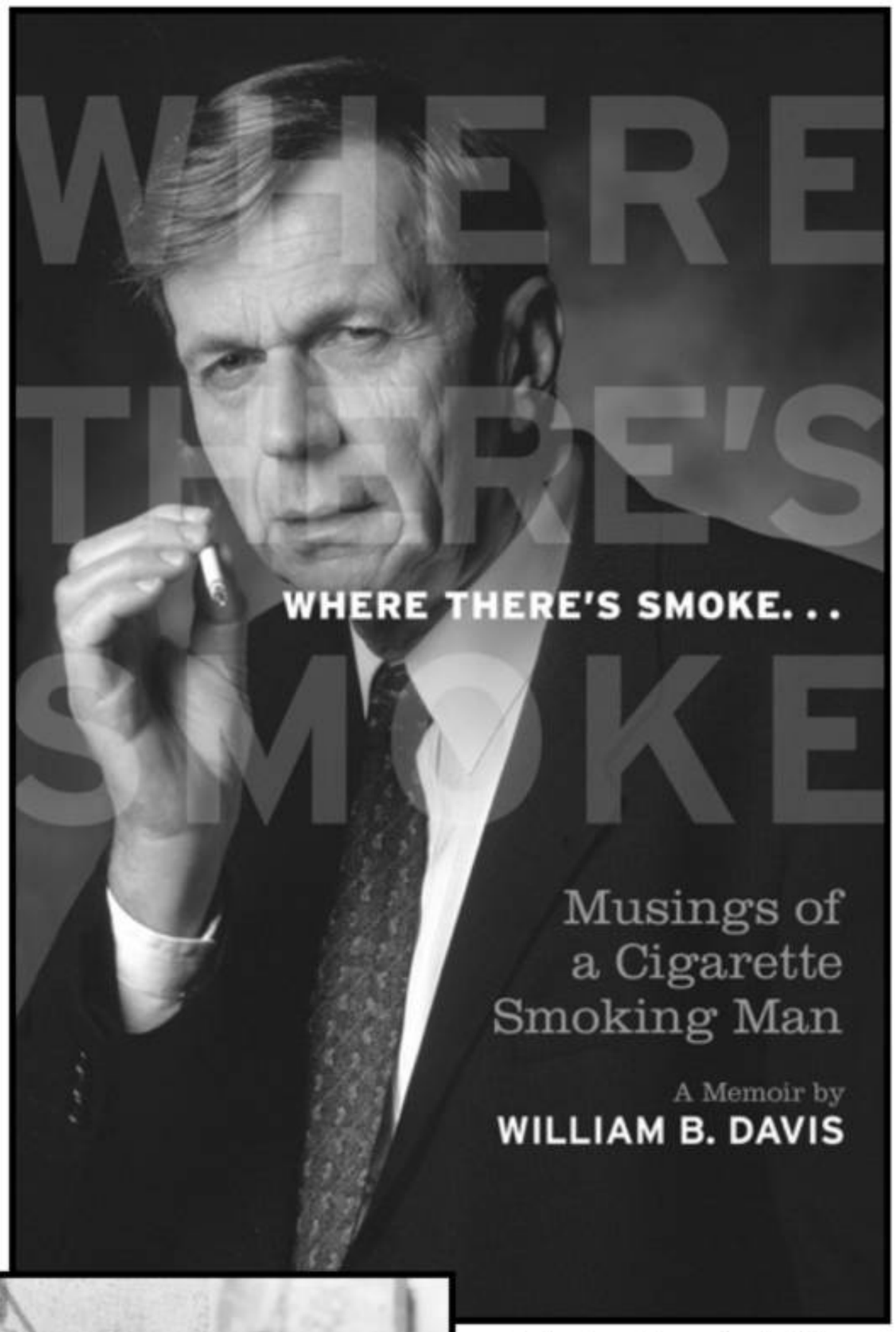
Based on the true exploits of Linda Zimmermann, a real-life ghost hunter, issue #1's storyline finds our heroine, Elle Zee, in the midst of a paranormal case concerning an evil entity called The Shadow's Man. The writing is exceptional and keeps in the 'spirit' of its '70s horror-comic predecessors.

One of the only faults to be found with *Ghost Investigator* is its short length, running only sixteen pages of story-filled content. A few additional pages wouldn't have been uncalled-for. Personally, I'd like to see future issues adopt an anthology style, having a few stories following Elle's exploits. Currently adhering to the standard comic sized format, *Ghost Investigator* may also benefit from being printed in a larger magazine size. These are only minor criticisms and *Ghost Investigator* has so much going for it that the $2.50 cover price is practically a steal. I'm intrigued to see where issue #2 goes, but one thing's for sure – when it comes out, I'll be reading it. Highly recommended.

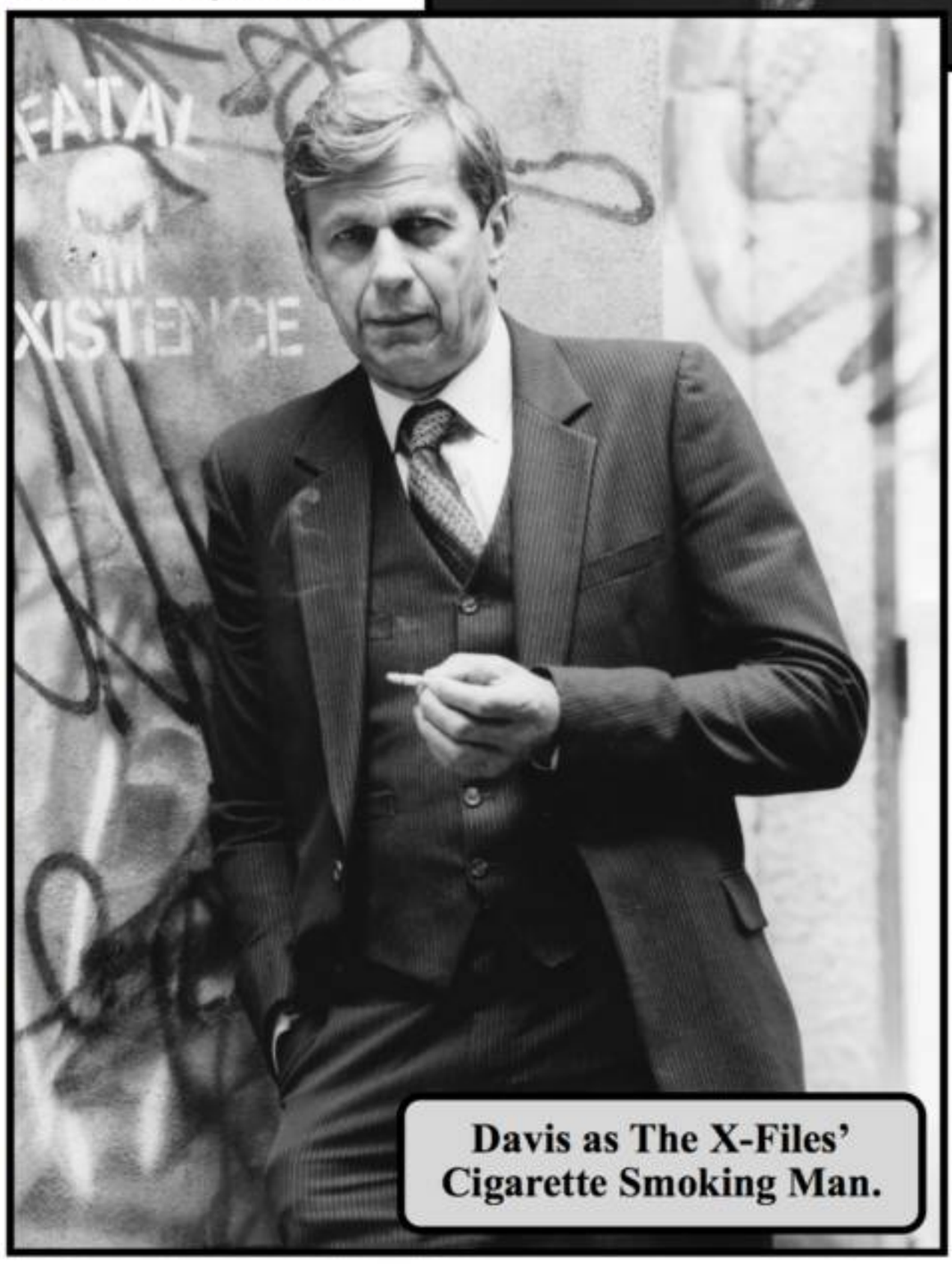
---Reviewed by Stan Fuller

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE...
MUSINGS OF A CIGARETTE SMOKING MAN
ECW Press; 2011, 279 pages; Author: William B. Davis.

THE TRUTH IS IN HERE



Bill Davis is one of the greatest television villains of all time – the Cigarette Smoking Man, a mysterious individual who had first appeared in the pilot episode of *The X-Files*, sulking in the shadows with a lit cigarette firmly clenched between thumb and forefinger. As the series progressed, so did Davis' role; his character's sinister machinations were always one of the show's highlights and his volatile relationship with FBI agent Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) was an intriguing rivalry imbued with tense complexities that are lacking in most television programs today. It goes without saying that *The X-Files* turned Davis into a distinguished television luminary the world over. The iconic show may have ended its nine season run back in 2002 but it still remains a fan favorite to this day – despite 2008's disappointing *I Want to Believe* feature film (which sadly didn't co-star Davis, an addition that would have likely improved the story to a considerable degree).


Davis as The X-Files' Cigarette Smoking Man.

While *X-Files* fans and aficionados may only be familiar with Davis when equipped with cigarette in hand, encircled by a plume of smoke, and committing villainous deeds, rest assured, there is much more to this versatile actor than mere *smoke* and mirrors. At first glance Davis' memoir, *Where There's Smoke*, is surprisingly light on *X-Files* content – though the last chapter does his contribution to the show justice. Instead, the bulk of Davis' writing comprises his early life and impressive work in theatre, both in the UK and Canada.

The problem with a number of recent memoirs I've read is their tendency to become dull after awhile or, worst yet, that you find the author to be either unbearable in attitude or by their precedent actions. Evidently the new method

of scribing one's own memoir entails droning on about a particular impassioned subject, giving primary direction to no shortage of depressing material (misery loves company, perhaps?), and focusing heavy fire on their friends, now-turned-bitter-enemies. This is *not* the case here; Davis writes with a candid humor that will have you turning page after page to join him in his many adventures, trials and triumphs. You can't help but be swept into the man's life.

Truth be told, I have only a passing interest in theatre. I certainly respect the men and women who work in the medium, but it's never been a passion for me. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but be enthralled by Davis' work in the field, the accounts of other actors he's worked with (Donald Sutherland, for one), and his many experiences therein. As much as *Where There's Smoke* is a memoir, it is also a cultural commentary that transports you to the '50s, '60s, '70s, and beyond. Often, I felt like I was time traveling with Davis through these decades, reliving the events that shaped his eventful if not, at times, checkered past. Davis' conversational tone proved to be a welcomed surprise as he recounted his life stories, which ranged from the poignant to the mildly scandalous.

Ironically, Davis played one of the nastiest, deplorable characters on television, yet he has penned one of the most likable, downright fun, and certainly well-written memoirs I have ever had the pleasure of reading.

Davis has directed and produced theatre, performed on stage, worked on radio, acted in television and film, he's an avid skier, a respected teacher, apparently quite a lover, and a smoker. Davis holds nothing back as he shares his experiences about fellow *X-Files* actors and crew members, his thoughts on theatre, acting, directing, the cultural landscape, politics, and shares his opinion on paranormal phenomena, among *many* other subjects.

Fans of *The X-Files*, lovers of theatre, or those simply interested in the human experience are recommended to give *Where There's Smoke* a read. You will not be disappointed. If you ever wanted to sit down in your living room and have a drink with the Cigarette Smoking Man, while he unravels his innermost mysteries, here's your chance. Get ready for some interesting recollections, but please, don't mind the smoke.

---Reviewed by Scott Clark

THE BIGFOOT FILMOGRAPHY: FICTIONAL AND DOCUMENTARY APPEARANCES IN FILM AND TELEVISION

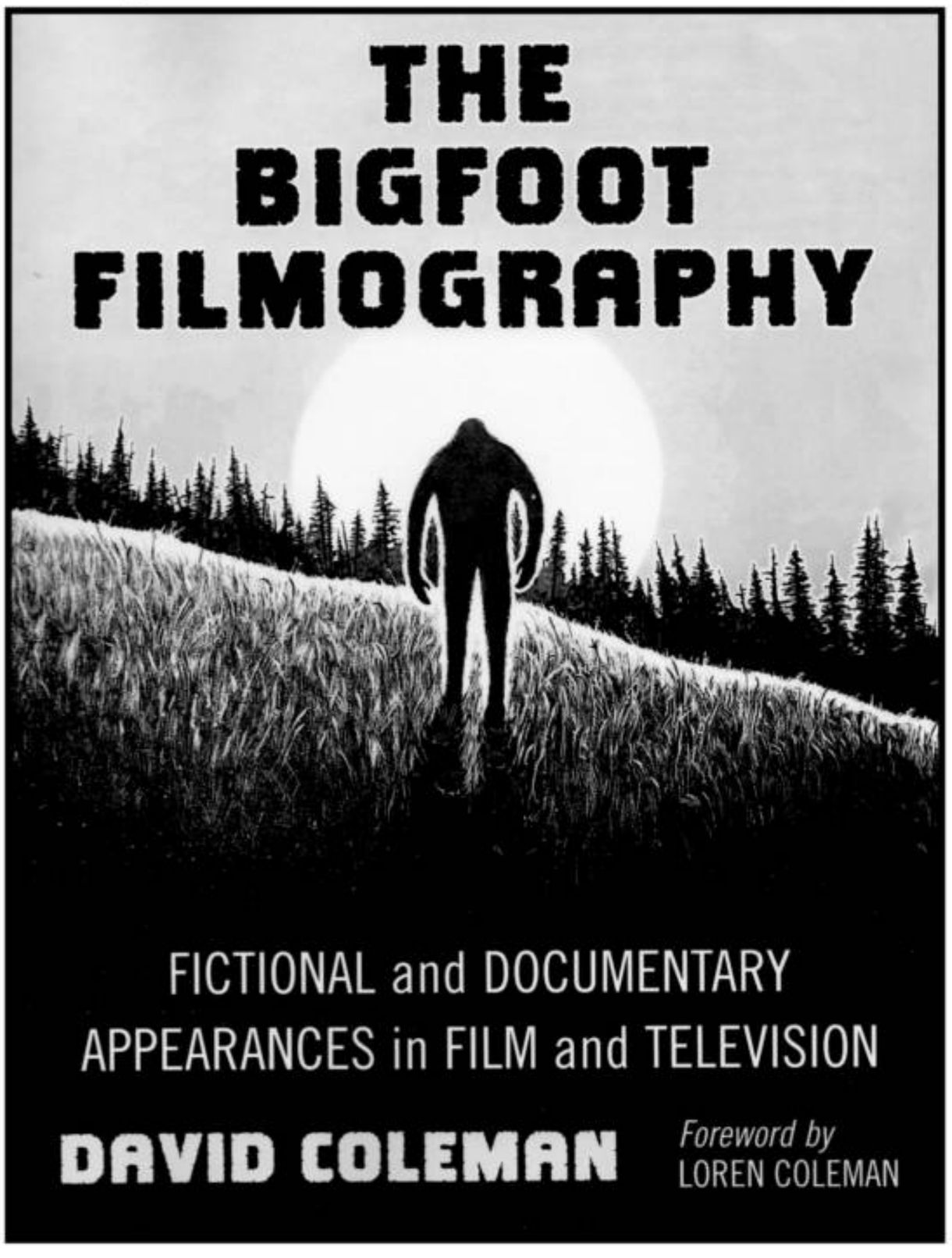
McFarland and Company, Inc.; 2012, 344 pages; Author: David Coleman.

WHAT ROUGH BEAST?

There are numerous filmographies on cinematic creatures that go bump in the night – *The Werewolf Book: The Encyclopedia of Shape-Shifting Beings*, *V is for Vampire: The A-Z Guide to Everything Undead*, and *Zombie Movies: The Ultimate Guide*, to name a few. All worth reading, I might add, but only so many times can one explore the particulars of the vampire or zombie genre before covering the same old ground. It's unfortunate that one of the *biggest* mon-stars is so often overlooked. Yes, we're talking about the hairy lug himself, Bigfoot. Despite his hundreds of appearances in film and television, the elusive cryptid never gets his due – until now, that is.

Thanks to David Coleman's *The Bigfoot Filmography*, fans of the genre *finally* have an indispensable tome of information at their fingertips chronicling every screen appearance of the Sasquatch. Coleman should be applauded for the incredible amount of research that went into this book – the sheer volume of content packed between covers is nothing short of staggering – no stone is left unturned in an effort to uncover even the most obscure Bigfoot appearance. Being an avid fan of the genre myself, I was under the assumption that, over the years, I had managed to track down and view the majority of Bigfoot, Yeti and Sasquatch-themed films. Not so. Coleman has – to my delight – opened my eyes to scores upon scores of Bigfoot flicks that have yet to be seen!

The Bigfoot Filmography is the first and, to my knowledge, *only* source to ever credit the various Bigfoot films as a legitimate genre – which Coleman has affectionately dubbed, "Ciné du Sasquatch". Even the most jaded followers of Bigfoot's on-screen exploits, who are familiar with genre mainstays like *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, the comedic *Harry and the Hendersons*, and perhaps even the *Six Million Dollar Man* two-part episode, starring Andre the Giant as the hair-covered hominid, will



find much to enjoy here.

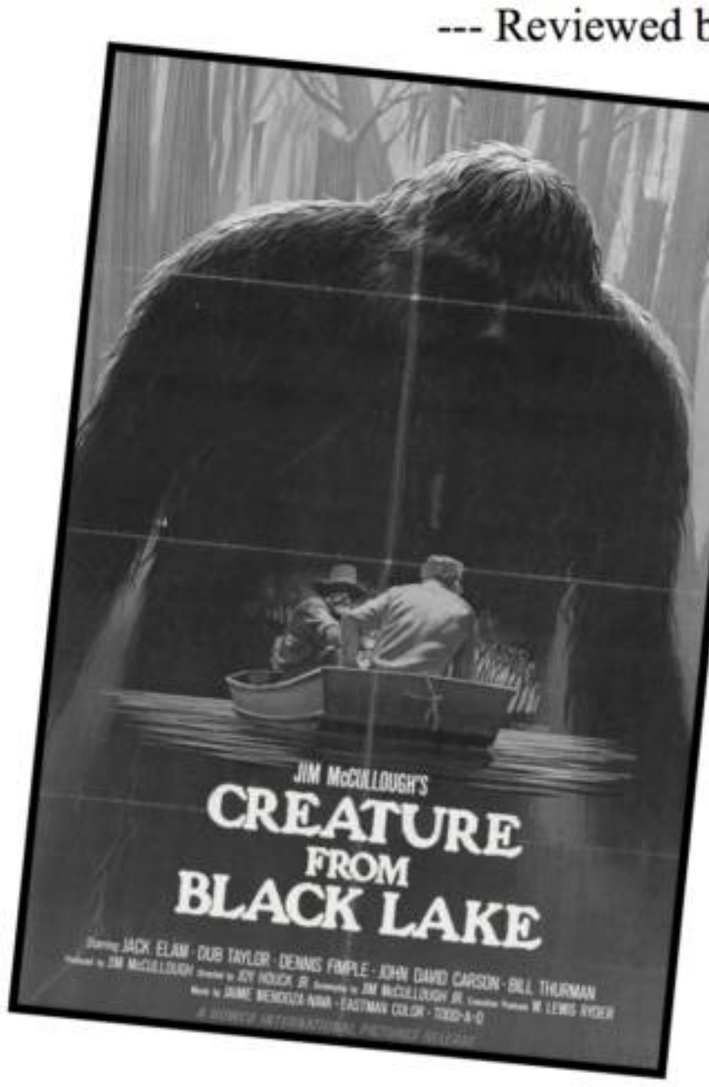
Through Coleman's exhaustive digest of information it becomes clear that Ciné du Sasquatch has been around since early silent film, evidenced in George Méliès' *The Conquest of the Pole*. Equally impressive and surprising is the international fame Bigfoot has achieved, including his cameos in Japan's *Astro Boy* and *Ultraman* television programs, to the Spanish-produced *Werewolf and the Yeti*, and beyond. Not bad for a missing link…

The Bigfoot Filmography is divided up into several parts, the first features Coleman's essay "Ciné du Sasquatch as a Genre Convention" – an intriguing read that sets the stage for the fantastic catalogue of films to follow. Next we have Bigfoot's film and television appearances, each with a thorough synopsis as well as Coleman's own thoughts. The final chapter of the book highlights interviews with Bigfoot filmmakers, and is an added treat. In addition, there are a number of great stills, production photos, lobby cards, and some of the most lurid movie posters to ever be created, spread across the pages. By the end of the book, one can not help but feel in awe at just how *big* of a star Bigfoot is. Movies, cartoons, TV, even commercials – he's been in it all.

In short, it's not possible to find a single negative aspect about *The Bigfoot Filmography*. Thus far, this is the best book of 2012. Not only is it a fun read, but it's one that you'll find yourself returning to again and again. Highly recommended!

You can order David Coleman's *The Bigfoot Filmography* direct from McFarland via their website at McFarlandPub.com or over the phone at 800-253-2187.

--- Reviewed by Andrew Parietti



***Left: Creature from Black Lake*, just one of the many Ciné du Sasquatch films covered in David Coleman's *The Bigfoot Filmography*.**

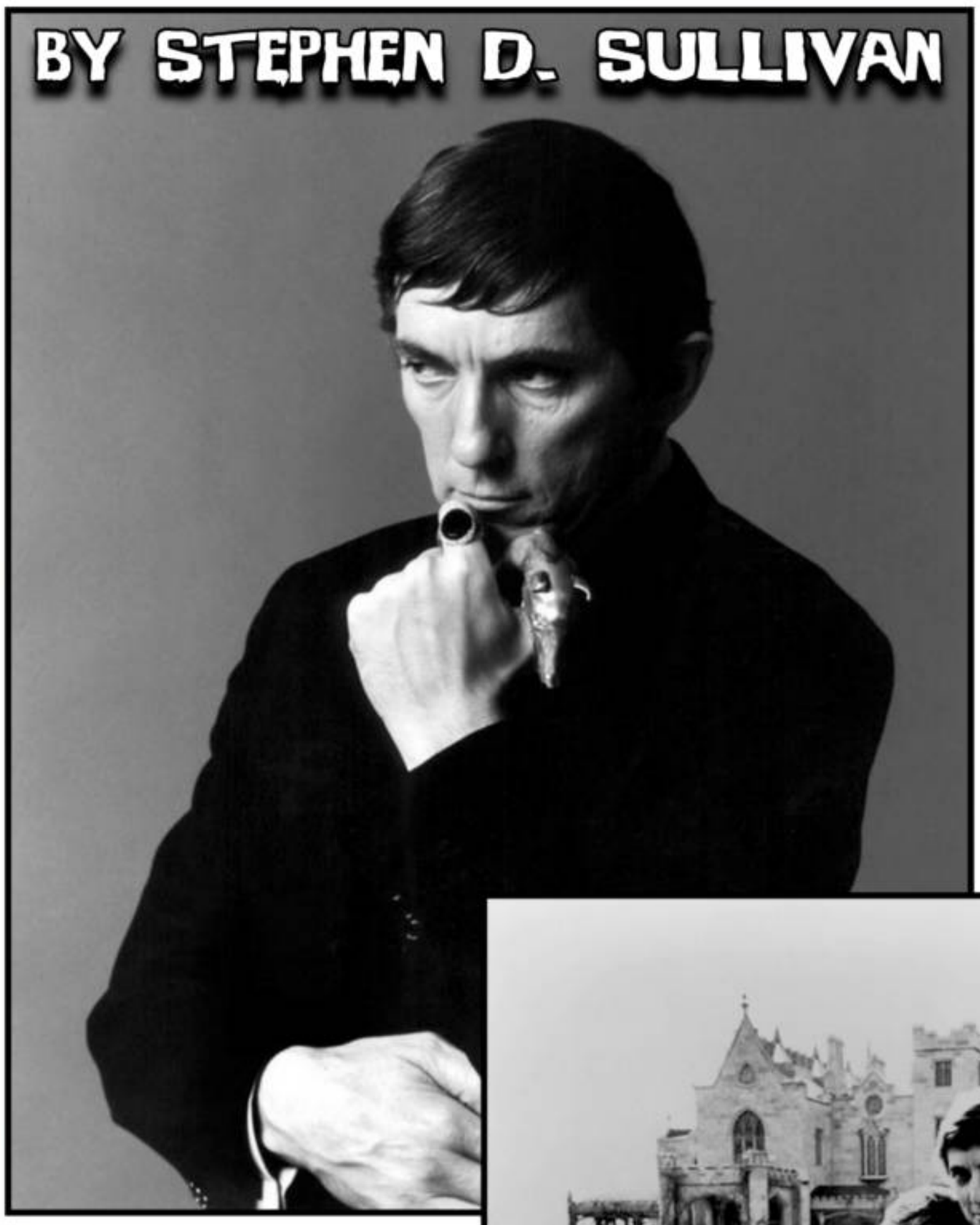
JONATHAN FRID
THE REAL BARNABAS COLLINS

A TRIBUTE

85
SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE SPRING 2012

BY STEPHEN D. SULLIVAN

Jonathan Frid, a.k.a. Barnabas Collins, the vampire with a soul, has died. He was one of my heroes. Fittingly for a horror icon, Mr. Frid died on Friday the 13th (of April, 2012), the 45th anniversary of the day he first walked onto the set of *Dark Shadows* -- Dan Curtis' cult-favorite Gothic soap opera. Also fittingly, Mr. Frid's family waited until April 18th to release the news of his death, to memorialize the anniversary of his first broadcast appearance on the show (April 18, 1967).



Dark Shadows was my favorite TV show as I kid. I don't think there was even a close second (maybe *Star Trek*). Like millions of kids, I raced home from school every day to catch the latest episode.

We were lucky, my brother Mark and I; we lived between Boston and Providence, so we got the show on 2 channels, one after another, every day -- an important advantage in the days before DVRs or even VCRs. And somewhere during the run, the two stations got out of sync, so the 4 o'clock show was the newest, and the 3:30 show was the one from the previous day.

That meant we got a *full hour* of *Dark Shadows* each day, and we got to watch every episode of *Dark Shadows* twice. So that's what Mark and I did for for the majority of the show's run. Because of those glorious afternoon double-features, I don't think we ever missed an episode. (Our youngest brothers, born during the show's 1966-1971 run, missed this thrill -- though they caught *DS* in the repeats that started almost immediately following the show's demise, and became big as well.) But after-school double-features were not how I *first* experienced the show.

I originally stumbled across *Dark Shadows* when the Boston channel had it playing around 9am. I discovered it accidentally, while home sick from school one day. Naturally, *more* sick days followed. (Sometimes, I was even *actually* sick.) I loved the werewolves and witches and ghosts and, of course, the vampires. And one vampire in particular.

Barnabas Collins was the vampire to end all vampires. He was the first "vampire with a soul" — a man fighting as hard as he could against an affliction he could not control. I suppose, as a kid with chronic health problems, that probably meant more to me than it might have to most (though that idea didn't occur to me until just now, when I shared it).

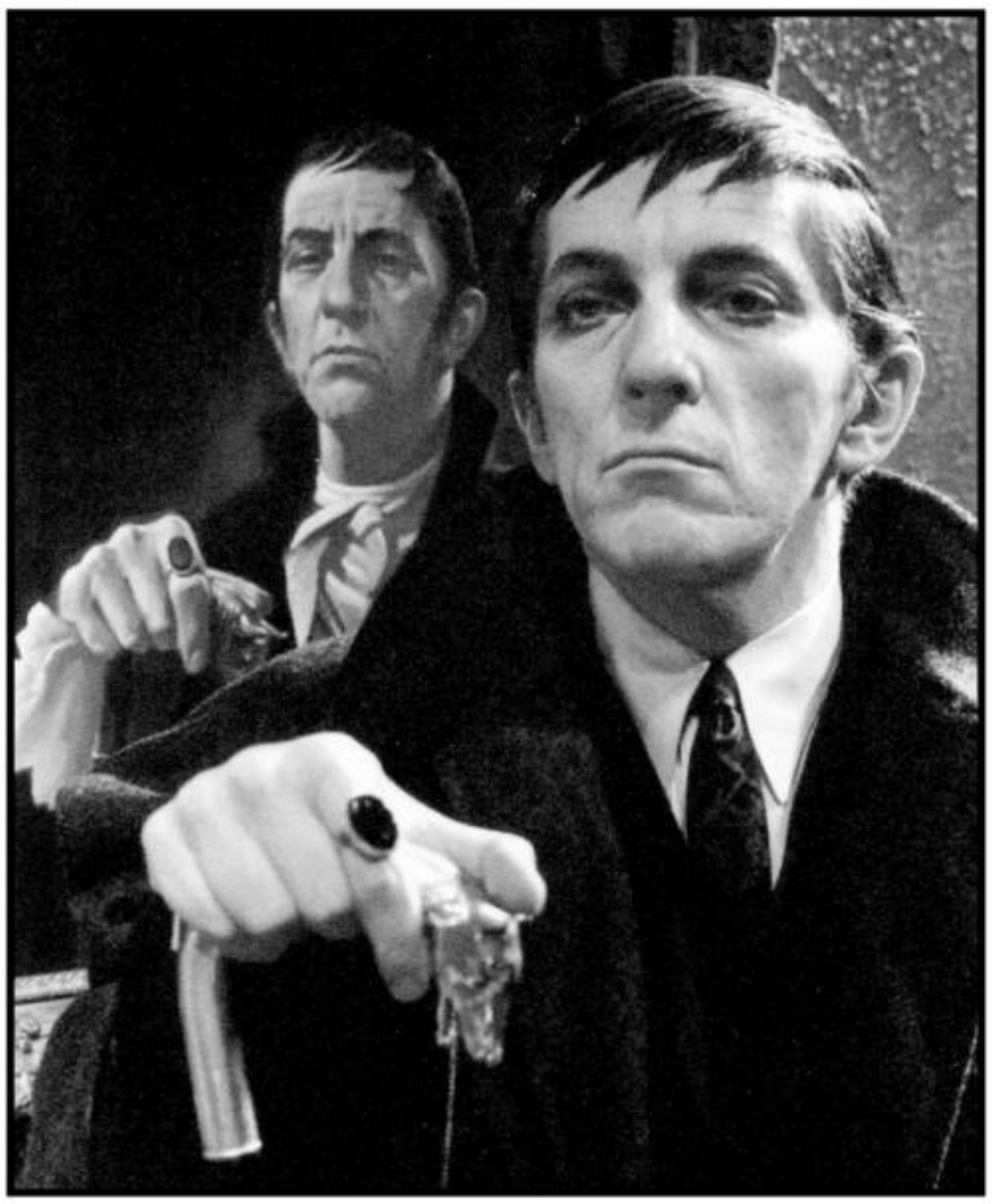
At the time, though, I just thought Barnabas was the coolest thing ever. Sure, vampirism was a curse, but who wouldn't want to walk the night as an immortal, able to change into a bat and vanish at will? Who wouldn't want to be

Kathryn Leigh Scott and Jonathan Frid.

completely irresistible to women? Who wouldn't want to have Maggie Evans (Kathryn Leigh Scott) under his power? Certainly not this pre-teen.

The Barnabas character was supposed to be a short-lived stunt. He was brought in as a desperate attempt to shore up the show's failing ratings — a last-gasp attempt, as it were. And boy, did it ever work!

Barnabas soon turned from a one-shot heavy into the heart and soul of the program. Though the show's writing was good, I have to give nearly all of the credit to Mr. Frid. A practiced stage actor, Jonathan Frid brought an intensity and gravitas to the role in a way seldom seen on TV, never



mind in a soap opera.

He also brought a poignant stranger-in-a-strange-land quality to the character that fit in perfectly with the 200-year-old vampire he was playing. Some of it — most of it, probably — was certainly due to Mr. Frid's acting talent. Another portion, though, I later found out, probably had to do with the strictures of daytime TV and the crazy live-on-tape nature of the production. Frid, accustomed to working on the stage, didn't have time to prepare and memorize as he would have liked, because every day was a new teleplay. This, I think, added to Barnabas' "lost boy" quality, which was one of the things that made the character so endearing.

Who, as a child or teen (or even an adult), hasn't felt lost amid the turmoil of the modern world?

It's ironic that on *Dark Shadows*, the best-trained stars (Mr. Frid and Joan Bennett) seemed the most likely to flub their lines. But just watch the power they, and especially Mr. Frid, brought to the screen: an intensity and presence never before seen in daytime TV. Which is not to cut down the considerable acting talents of the rest of the cast. *Dark Shadows* was a hard-working repertory company filled

with incredible actors. Every day they brought 30 minutes of horror-based drama to daytime TV, and — because the producers had only a brief time each day with the expensive master video recorder — the show pretty much never allowed second takes.

If an actor botched a scene, it was up to him or her to rescue it, because the tape was still rolling.

To sustain making such a production over a week would be a tough job; to sustain it across 1225 episodes (all of which are available on DVD from www.mpihomevideo.com) is nothing short of astonishing. Mr. Frid was not in all those episodes, but from the moment he appeared, *Dark Shadows* was his show. And we were *his* fans, as loyal as any of the thralls whom Barnabas had bitten on the neck.

I was, and continue to be, an immense fan of both the actors and the show.

In 1996, I

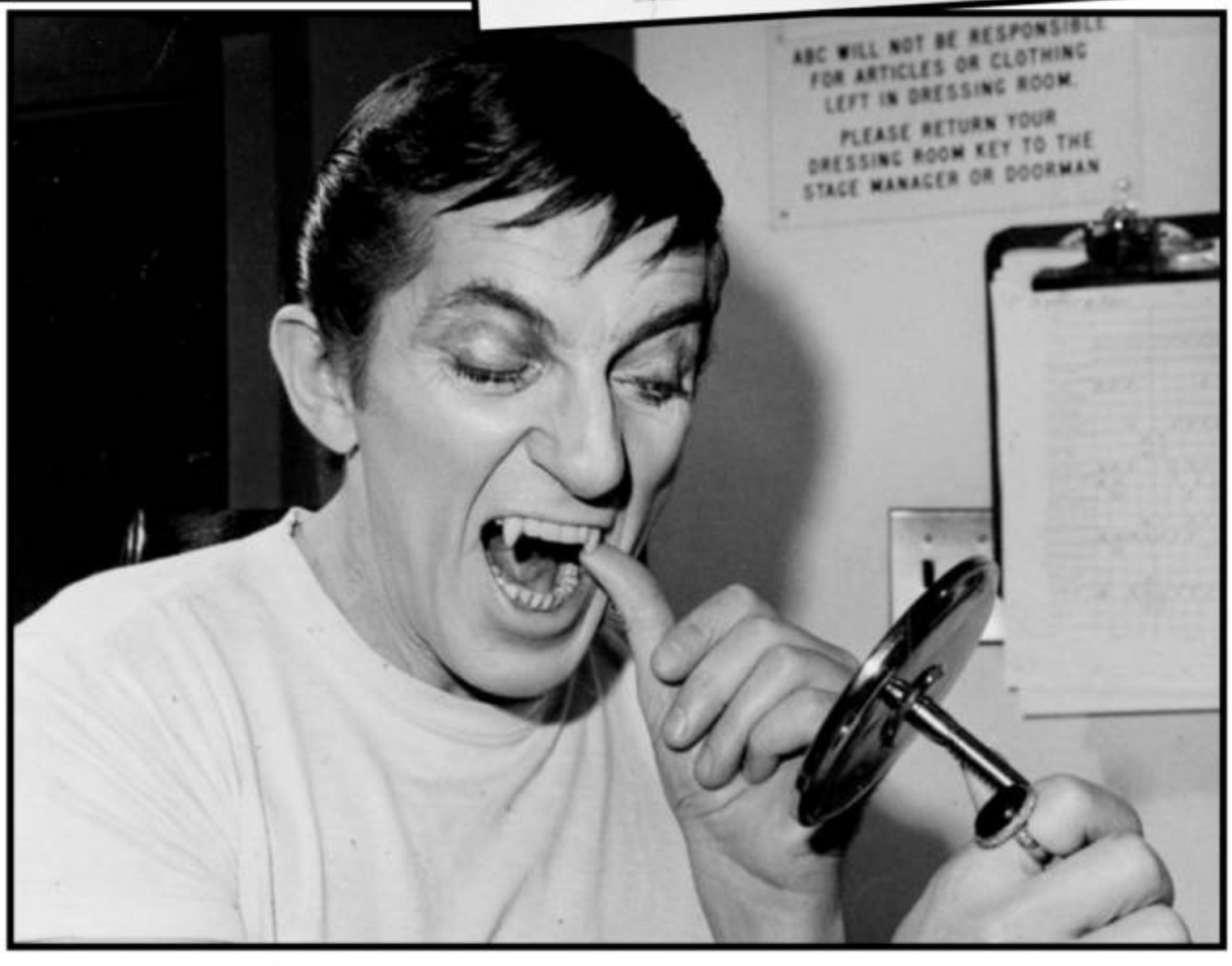
dedicated the original publication of my second *Frost Harrow* novel to Mr. Frid (and Kathryn Leigh Scott & Darren McGavin). The book appeared in e-format only (yeah, I was doing e-books before people had e-readers; bad marketing move on my part), so I doubt he ever knew it. I also doubt that he and the other cast members knew they made a tribute appearance in *Hardy Boys #173 — Speed Times Five* (as Robert Frid, Quentin Curtis, and Maggie Collins).

I know many other authors and creators have paid tribute to the show, and I suspect that even more have sneaked in subtle winks like the one above into their work. I had hoped to send Mr. Frid a copy of the new version of *Frost Harrow #2: Die With Me* when it comes out later this year (2012). Sadly, that will not now be possible.

However, despite not being a convention goer (I became a gaming pro in 1980, too early to relish going back to "mere fan" later), I did have some contact with Mr. Frid via his website. And earlier this year, I got an autographed photograph from him, which I've shared on my site www.StephenDSullivan.com. (Search for "Jonathan Frid" or "Barnabas Collins.")

I have only two autographed photos in my collection, both from *Dark Shadows* stars.

One is from Mr. Frid, the other is from Kathryn Leigh Scott, his TV and film co-star.



Happily, she is alive, well, publishing great books -- www.PomPress.com -- and keeping the *Dark Shadows* legend alive. You can follow her on Twitter here:

https://twitter.com/#!/Dark_Passages

As for me, I'll continue doing work inspired by Mr. Frid and *Dark Shadows* for as long as I live, including *Frost Harrow* and, I suspect, many other projects as well.

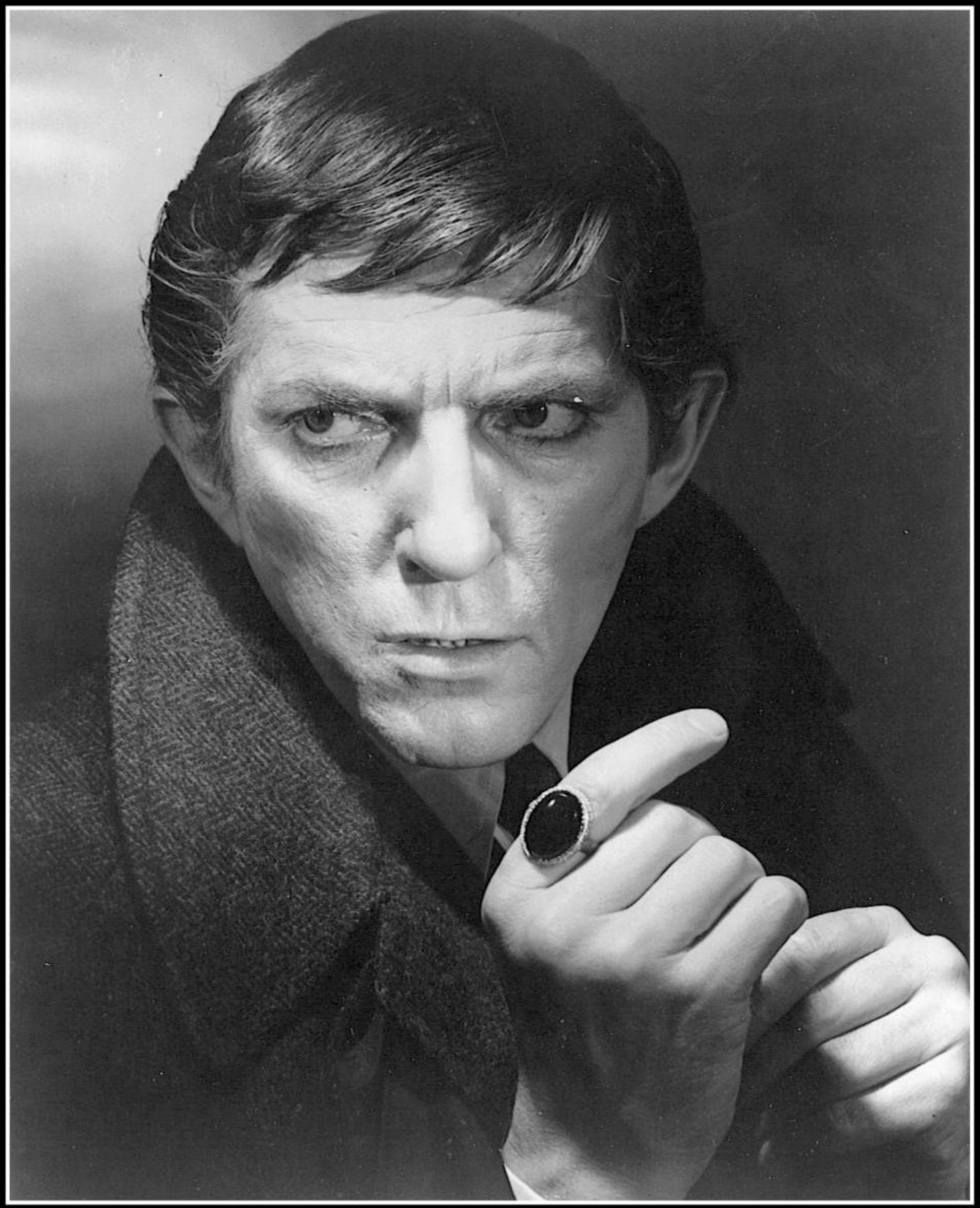
So thank you, Mr. Frid, for *Dark Shadows*, for conflicted vampires that don't need to sparkle to have a soul, and for many days of wonder experienced by boys and girls everywhere. Long may you be remembered, and may you Rest In Peace.

With Love, Your Fan,

Stephen D. Sullivan
www.stephendsullivan.com
www.twitter.com/sdsullivan
www.facebook.com/sdsbooks
www.frostharrow.com

Lifelong monster maniac, Stephen D. Sullivan is the award-winning author of more than 50 books and numerous short stories. Additionally, he has worked on more RPG gaming and comics properties than he can easily count. His projects have included Dungeons & Dragons, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Star Wars, Iron Man, Thunderbirds, The Simpsons, Middle Earth, Fantastic 4, Speed Racer, Dragonlance, Legend of the Five Rings, Darkwing Duck, Mage Knight, *and many others. He is currently updating his* Frost Harrow *novels for modern e-readers. His most recent works include* The Crimson Collection: The Complete Short Stories 2000-2011 *(available at Amazon.com), and "Elf Princess on Mars" (a bawdy Martian Princess mash-up featuring classic SF characters ... and nearly naked elves).*

You can contact Steve through his website -- www.StephenDSullivan.com (Adventure guaranteed. Monsters optional.) *-- or write to him directly via: fanmail@stephendsullivan.com.*



IN MEMORY OF
JONATHAN FRID
1924-2012

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23)

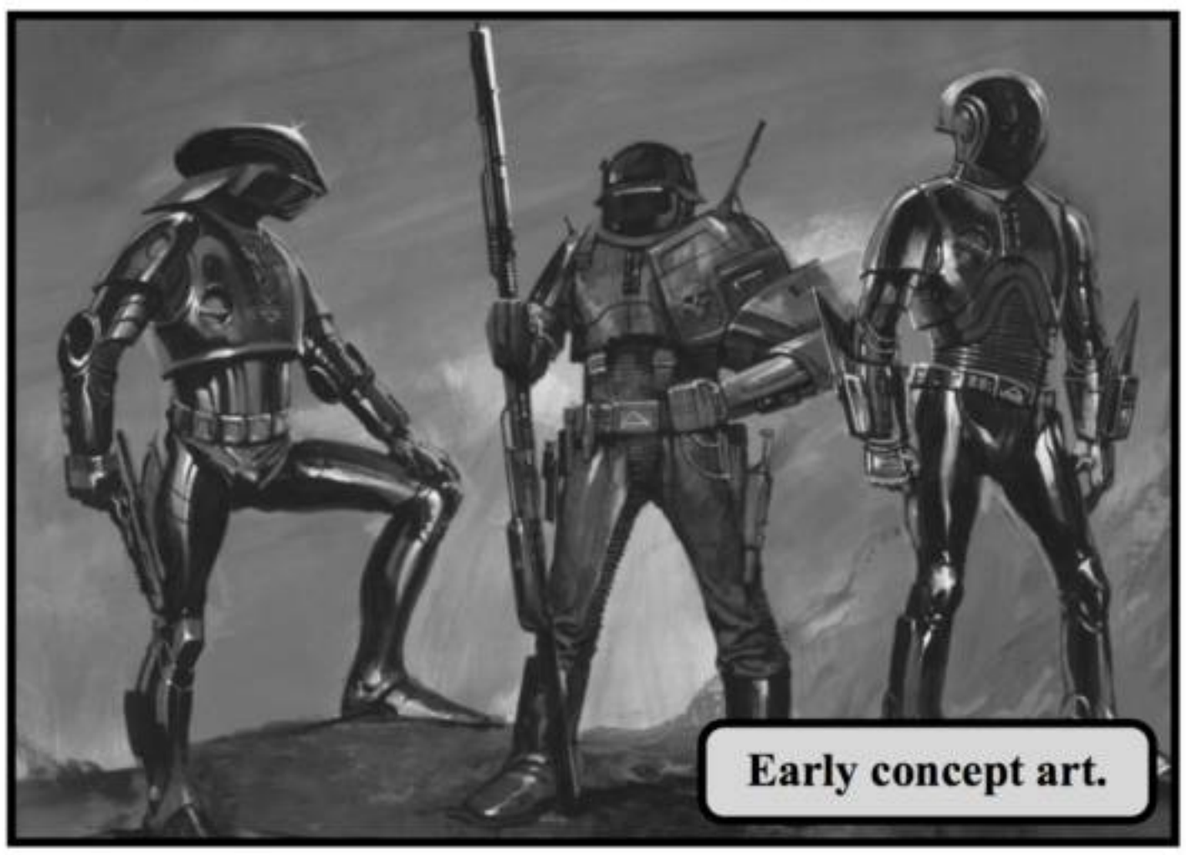
MUSIC IN THE KEY OF 'HE'

The epic, soaring musical score of *Masters of the Universe* was composed by Bill Conti, who had previously written the scores to *Rocky*, *For Your Eyes Only*, and *The Karate Kid*, among many other popular films. In 2008 a limited edition 2-CD *Masters of the Universe* soundtrack was released featuring Bill Conti's complete unreleased score (an incomplete version had been available in 1987). The set also came with an exclusive booklet with in-depth liner notes. Only 3,000 of these limited editions were produced (currently out-of-print). Just try to listen to the film's main theme without yelling "I have the power!" or reciting Skeletor's climatic throne room monologue while the "Transformation of Skeletor" track plays over your sound system!

UNIVERSAL ADVENTURE?

2012 marks the 25th anniversary of the live-action *Masters of the Universe*, so it's only appropriate to look back on the film and evaluate its merits and downfalls. Does it hold up? Is it still worth a viewing? Or has it become outdated, marred by the passage of a quarter century? The truth is *Masters of the Universe* is a *great* film – one that's still more entertaining than most of the dreck being churned out by Hollywood today. Are some of the special effects dated? Sure, though most have aged considerably well. Modern advancements in CGI allow for nearly anything to appear on the screen, but at what cost? Even *The Matrix* trilogy, applauded for its CGI at the time, already shows signs of aging digital effects.

One of Skeletor's troops charging into action.



Early concept art.

Story-wise *Masters of the Universe* is the archetypal good vs. evil tale. It never gets bogged down by the political diatribe of the *Star Wars* prequels which moreover managed to dilute the evil presence of Darth Vader. Lucas' prequels gave the viewer innumerable reasons to sympathize with the tragic nature of the Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader character, that's all well and good – there's nothing wrong with adding more layers and depth to a character – but it's hard to watch the original trilogy now without thinking how un-evil little Ani Skywalker once was. Even the mystery and menace surrounding the Emperor is somewhat weakened by having observed his past political dealings as a senator. Enter Skeletor – few villains

The set design of MOTU is eye-popping, especially the throne room of Castle Grayskull. The detailed costuming is another high-note; the wardrobe department spared no imagination on the attire of Skeletor's group of mercenaries, nor on the God Skeletor outfit. Even Skeletor's armored troops are formidable in appearance (though, admittedly, they do bear a strong resemble to Darth Vader).

FOR THE HONOR OF GRAYSKULL

Even though *Masters of the Universe* didn't come remotely close to shattering any box office records, it was still acknowledged in the film community. In 1988 *Masters* was recognized by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films, awarding Gary Goddard with a Silver Scroll Award for Outstanding Achievement. MOTU was also nominated for three Saturn Awards (Best Costumes, Best Special Effects, and Best Science Fiction Film). That same year Fantasporto honored *Masters* with an International Fantasy Film Award for Best Special Effects, as well as a nomination for Best Film.

SECRETS OF THE SWORD

Urban Archipelago Films is currently working on the first ever feature-length documentary on the *Masters of the Universe* phenomenon, encompassing every aspect of the popular franchise including the toys, cartoons, comics, film, and more! To keep updated on *Toy Masters*, visit the official website at www.ToyMastersMovie.com

are as purely evil – a creature that is, in essence, evil *incarnate*. He exists for one reason, one absolute goal: total conquest of Eternia and the subjugation of his most hated foe, He-Man. Skeletor won't strive to be an emperor or mere overlord, by the climax of the film he becomes a literal "god," having absorbed the power from the universe itself! Likewise, Skeletor is unabashed about his evil nature, revealed in his dialogue when confronting He-Man, "Tell me about the loneliness of good, He-Man. Is it equal to the loneliness of evil?"

LEGACY

David Odell, screenwriter of *The Dark Crystal* (1982) and *Supergirl* (1984), penned the tight, fast-paced script for *Masters of the Universe*. His previous excursions into the realms of fantasy give *Masters* the otherworldly feel it should have, even during the Earth scenes when the Eternians are present. Gary Goddard, despite his inexperience, directs the action well – offering dramatic intensity to the fight sequences and applying a larger-than-life sensibility to the film. The tracking shot of Skeletor's first appearance, with an orchestral score pounding in the background, is still a favorite moment. Not only was Goddard tasked with budget limitations, but Cannon had put the production on an extremely strict filming schedule. If Goddard was able to achieve what he did with *Masters* on such restrictions, it would have been interesting to see what he could have accomplished with freer reign and more money. It's a shame that Goddard hasn't returned behind the camera to helm more feature films.

Goddard prepares a shot with Gwildor.

Even today the *Masters of the Universe* film still divides the fan base. Its greatest downfall was due to an unfortunate misconception – people expected the movie to closely follow the Filmation series, which it obviously did not. In retrospect, it's clear that it was never Mattel, Cannon, or Goddard's intention to emulate the show – but to take a mythology (which stemmed from a toy line, mind you) and turn it into a 90 minute live-action spectacle. And they succeeded. Above all, the movie is entertaining, fun, and tells a simple, yet timeless story. The themes of friendship, teamwork, and defiance in the face of loss are

RETURN TO ETERNIA?

A sequel to *Masters of the Universe* was planned. With Cannon in the midst of financial difficulties the project was turned into the Jean-Claude Van Damme actioner *Cyborg* (1989), directed by Albert Pyun.

all there – and more palpable than what's found in Michael Bay's convoluted *Transformers* trilogy or *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra* (films all based on toys). For all the faults that people throw at *Masters*, the film can easily be viewed as the franchise's finest hour in terms of storytelling and creative vision. It's not a perfect film, but that's one of its charms. Rumor has it that Warner Brothers is currently at work restoring the film for Blu-ray and that the release will sport more than just the commentary and trailer that the bare-bones DVD had.

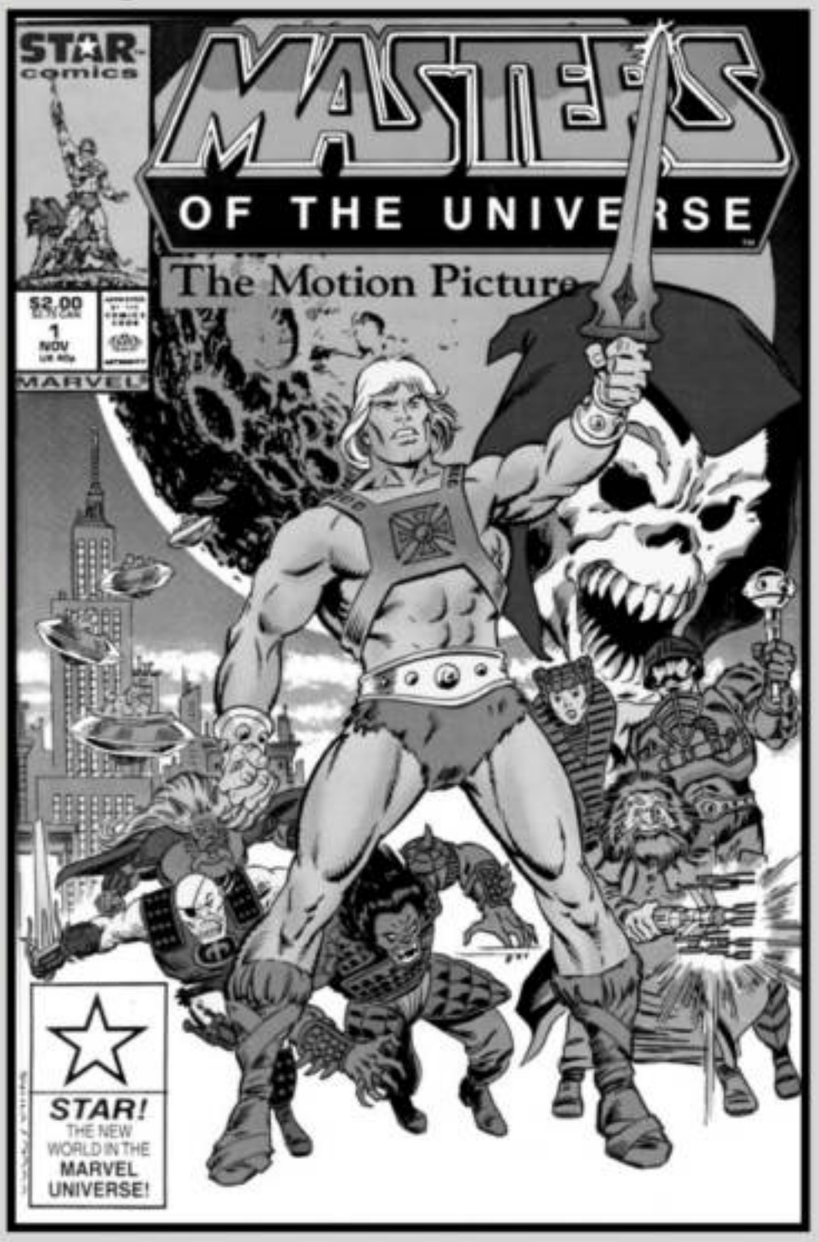
NEW ADVENTURE

Rumor of a live-action *Masters of the Universe* reboot has made the rounds in Hollywood for years. At one point John Woo was onboard as director before leaving the project. Currently, Columbia Pictures and Escape Artists have commissioned a new screenplay, written by *Predators* (2010) writer Alex Litvak. The film, titled *Grayskull*, is expected for a 2015 release. As of yet, no director has been attached.

The 1987 *Masters of the Universe* film will never have the same following as *Star Wars*, nor will it ever find a fan base larger than its already established cult status – regardless, for those that advocate its greatness, taking a journey to Eternia and watching Lundgren and Langella clash in battle is every bit as satisfying as traveling to a galaxy far, far away.

RETURN TO FORM

Star Comics, an imprint of Marvel, released a comic adaptation of the *Masters of the Universe* film back in 1987. The comic follows an earlier draft of the screenplay, resulting in several different scenes, including an alternate ending. The characters also retain the look of their earlier cartoon/action figure appearances.



DAVEY HORROR'S COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Charlie Chan Custom Action Figure Diorama

One of the world's greatest detectives has finally arrived in action figure form, although you won't find this one on the shelves of any toy store. This imaginative figure and display comes from the creative mind and collection of Davey Horror.

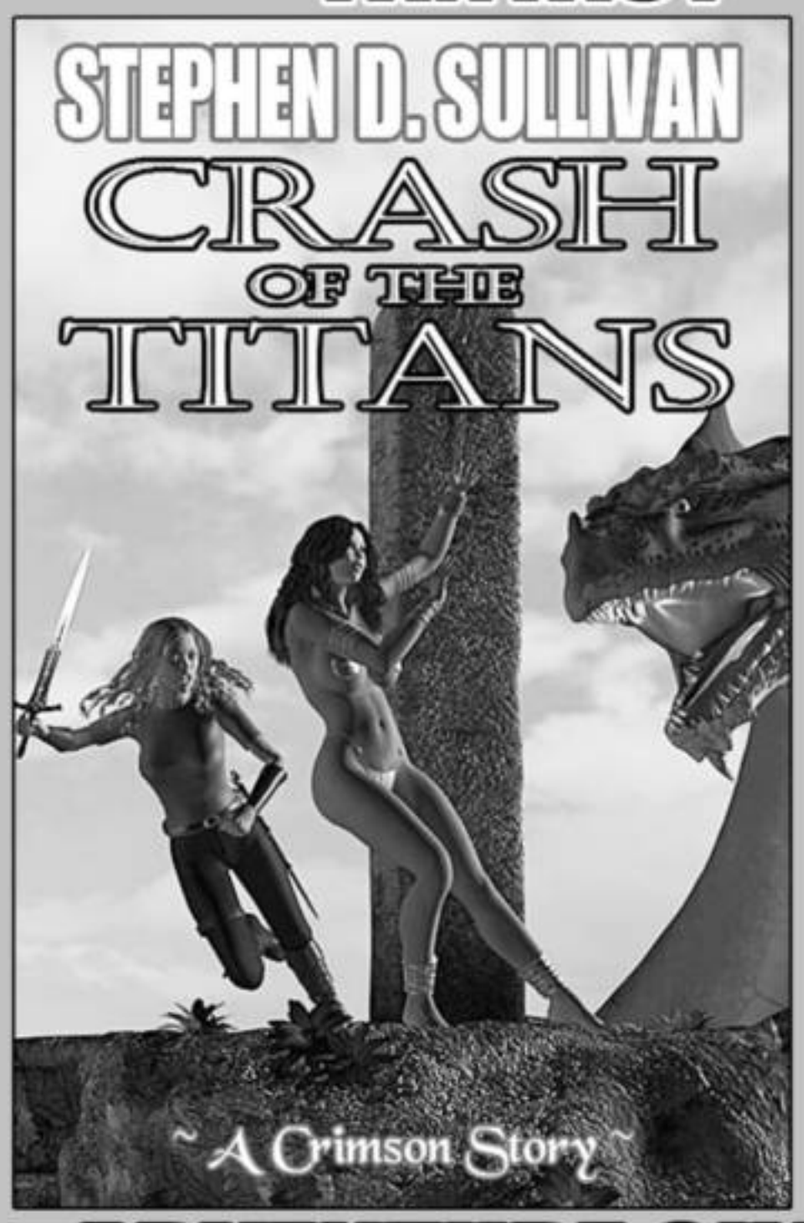
Charlie Chan was heavily customized from a discount-priced WWE wrestling action figure (Armando Estrada from the WWE 'Deluxe Aggression' line). The face was repainted and the body touched-up to hide the articulation joints. The hat was also altered, giving the brim Chan's signature 'pushed-up' look.

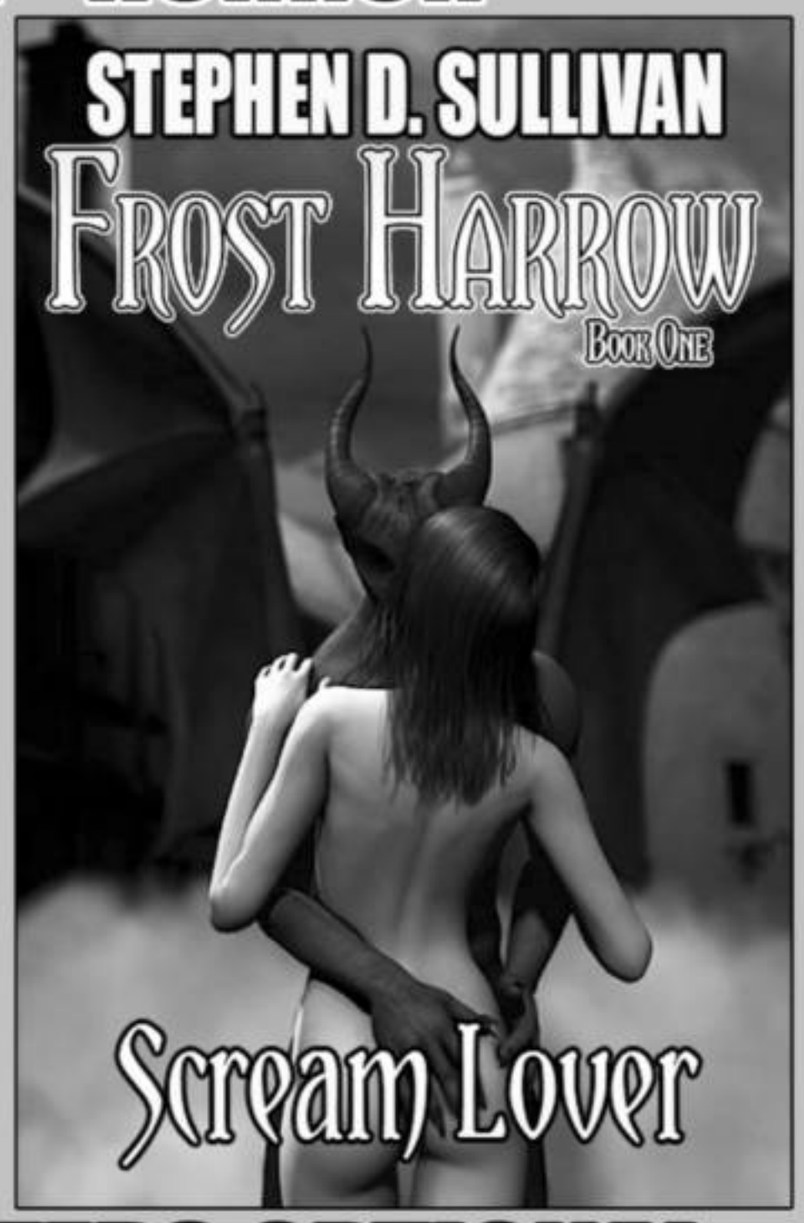
In one hand, Chan holds a pistol (taken and modified from a *Sin City* figure) and, in the other, he carries a flashlight (hand-made from a wooden peg and push-pin tack).

The back wall design features a doorway with a skeletal hand protruding from the shadows, along with a candle-lit skull atop a shelf, some spider-web, and a poster (with knife through it) of *Charlie Chan in the Wax Museum*.

A 'wax' head of Hitler rests upon a custom-built wooden table. The Hitler bust was created from an optional Sylvester Stallone head included in a vinyl *Judge Dredd* model kit, but was sanded down, modified, and repainted. The figure display is contained within a dark brown wood-grain 10x14 shadowbox with a glass cover.

FANTASY - SCIENCE FICTION - HORROR





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